

4-Week Short Course: Professional Framing For Photographers With Instructor John Siskin

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Lesson #1: Introduction to Framing

One of the problems of being a photographer is that we are capable of creating large numbers of images; we are prolific. And then what do we do with them? Digital has only made this worse. Do you only want to fill up your hard drive with your work? Would you rather pump them out of your printer and tack them to the wall?

The problem is that if we do not support our work with a high-quality presentation, no one else will respect our work. Edgar Degas, an impressionist painter, said, "The frame is the reward of the artist." It gives

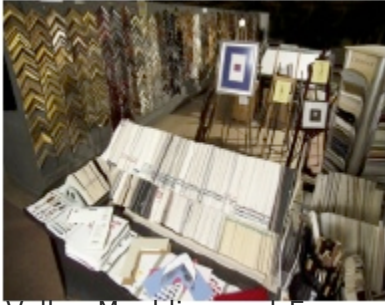


Picture on Refrigerator
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your work a sense of strength by providing a place, set apart, for your art to present itself to the viewer. My best images looked good in a tray full of fixer, better when I matted them and outstanding when they were in a frame. Each step in the process supports and encourages the image.

This week we are going to look at the print itself and we will be looking at the way in which the print is attached to the support, be that rag board or foam core. All the products and methods will be evaluated for how well they will last over time, that is are these processes archival. Not all processes need to last for long periods of time, but we need to be able to predict the outcome of a mounting method we choose to use.

One thing you will learn about framing is that you go through a heck of a lot of supplies. I use a wholesale frame supplier for a couple of reasons: first, I save money. Second, they have the products I want and need in stock. I also use an art supply store on occasion, but frequently they do not have what I want. I use [Valley](#)



Valley Moulding and Frame
Showroom
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Moulding and Frame. You can reach them at info@valleymoulding.com or (800)932-7665. They have three special kits available for this class. We put the kits together for different levels of users. I think they will be helpful.

Of course, if you are a portrait or wedding photographer, framing is a profit point for your business. I know some photographers who make as much on the frame as they do on the print. So doing your own framing can be a very important business

strategy. You should develop a business relationship with a wholesale framing supply business. This will allow you to do your own framing with access to any materials you might want. Even a photographer who doesn't frame work all the time can use a wholesale outfit. It is important to choose your suppliers well whether you are working on a few images for a show or creating family portraits for a living. You want them to be able to fill your orders quickly and provide quality products; the same things you want in a photographic equipment supplier.

What is Archival?

This leads us back to archival preparation. With the increasing number of print types available, photographers need to be aware of how our prints are presented and whether the presentation will help the print last a long time. Of course print preservation has always been an issue, but now it is more confusing. I consulted a photographic conservator while preparing this class. I will present the conservator's suggestions, along with some commercial options. I would like to emphasize that if you expect to sell photographs as memories for families, you should prepare them for maximum longevity. You owe that to your customers and to your reputation. If you promote your wedding or family portrait business by saying that you create family heirlooms, your finished prints should last longer than ten years. So we will take a look at the durability of the print first and then how to maintain that durability. There are other reasons to frame your work, and not all of these require archival preservation, Perhaps you are doing a trade show display. Sometimes things need to look good for 10 days not 100 years. I will be presenting ways to create dynamic displays, which are an important part of using photographs.

Archival Printers

There are currently at least two ink sets for desktop printers that are based on pigments rather than dyes. Pigments last much longer than dyes, so we will want these ink sets for our prints. Hewlett Packard makes an ink set called Vivera. If you use it with the HP Premium Plus Paper the prints are supposed to last for more than 100 years when displayed behind glass. This

information is from the [Wilhelm Imaging website](#) an independent site that evaluates print longevity. They have also tested the Epson Ultrachrome ink set. These are supposed to last from 60 to 100 years depending on paper (Epson offers more papers than HP). I have experience with recent printers from both these companies, and while both make good prints, I think the HP is a better printer.

Of course there are many facilities that make digital prints, either for the consumer or for the professional. Information about these prints is not always straightforward; this has always been a problem with photo labs. Many labs are printing with the large Epson printers, like the 4800, 7800 and 9800.

Epson 7600 Printer

These machines use the Ultrachrome Inks so if these prints are made on quality paper they will last for decades. There are also facilities that use the Iris printers, these are much more expensive than the Epson printers and you can expect the cost of the print to reflect this difference.

One of the other characteristics of the Iris printer is that it is designed for very high levels of production, so it may be more appropriate if you are doing a print edition.

E

All of these ink-jet printing methods, including the desktop printers, are called Giclee prints. You will want to be careful to know what a specific Giclee print actually is. You will also want to be able to represent your product accurately to your customer.

Other Types of Prints

Of course there are photographic prints made by other means than an inkjet. I want to mention just a few and discuss their permanence for the same reasons I am concerned with digital print permanence. Type C prints are the traditional print made from a color film negative. The original products of this type had very poor image stability, you may have some 20-year-old color print that show significant image degradation. Kodak currently claims that their type C products will last 100 years in typical home display. I am not sure I believe this, as I have examples of old Kodak prints that did not last. Still they are only claiming to be about even with current pigment based ink-jet prints. One print that we know lasts, because there are numerous examples, is the black and white fiber based print. Properly handled, with good fixing and great washing, these will last for a hundred years and maybe more. Unfortunately black and white resin coated (RC papers) will not last nearly as long. I have examples that have degradation in less than 20 years.

Many of what are today called the alternative processes, platinum, cyanotype and others have also lasted for more than 100 years, and so they can certainly be called archival.

Boards

Finally I need to mention the materials we will be putting our prints on. The gold standard for archival presentation is called rag board or museum board. This is generally available buffered (with alkali) or unbuffered. For most photographs an unbuffered or neutral Ph board is better. Color prints Platinum prints and cyanotype prints should be mounted on unbuffered board. I should mention that buffered board is more commonly available. The buffering raises the Ph, the problem with this increase in Ph is that it will interact the chemicals in the prints, causing color shifts, or worse. Be sure to verify that you are purchasing unbuffered board. Generally available in 2-ply thin and 4-ply regular thickness; there are only a limited number of colors. There are other archival boards, such as AlphaMat from Bainbridge, that are available in a rainbow of colors. These boards are designed with three layers, a color layer, a chemically purified pulp layer (the manufacturer may call this something else) and finally a rag layer that will go against the artwork. These boards are supposed to be as safe as rag board, however they are usually buffered, which can be a problem. In addition to archival products there are other display boards, Crescent and Bainbridge have a huge product line of colored boards.

There are support products other than board, and these are often useful for dramatic displays of large prints in offices or displays. The most common of these products is called foam core. Foam products are bad for photographs over the long term, they give off gasses that interact with the chemicals in the photograph. Foam core is a reasonably priced product that comes in sizes to at least 4X8 feet. Unfortunately foam core is not always very strong, consequently other products called Gator Board or Syntra are often used. Either Gator or Syntra are very hard, a much better material for long term or portable display. One very helpful product is a foam core board that has an adhesive layer built into one side of the board. This can make mounting very quick and easy. We'll be looking at this product down the page.

Tables

Now I am going to need table space before I can begin to do any framing. I normally use a door on top of supports. This is easy to put away. You can get the door and sawhorses at the Home depot or Lowes; the adjustable saw horses would be particularly good. This is a quick and easy table set-up. I suggest that you cover your work area with brown



Door used as Table Top

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paper; it is easy to get rid of after a framing session and it will help you to keep your work clean.

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Adhesives and P.A.T. Testing

Now we need to think about the products we'll use to do our framing. One way to evaluate the suitability of a product for use with photographs is to see if it passed the P.A.T. or photographic activity test. If the product passed, it will generally stand the test of time. More information about P.A.T testing is available at www.imagepermanenceinstitute.org. The P.A.T. test is a test of chemical suitability. So, although I often use permanent adhesives on prints this is not the preferred method of the conservation community. The preferred method is to use photo corners, because, in part, of the ease of removing the print from the board. As I introduce various methods of attaching a print to a board I will point out which methods are most archival, but other methods often have other advantages. None of the methods in today's lesson is considered to be the best archival practice. The biggest reason for this is that these methods of attaching the print are very difficult to reverse.

Steps in the Process

I will be introducing methods for attaching the print to the board in just a few more lines, but I want to point out that this is often not the first step. If I am going to place a mat, that is a board with the center cut out for the photograph, onto the photograph, I will cut the mat first. This is called a window mat or overmat. If I attach the photo to the board before I cut the mat it will be more difficult to re-arrange any mistakes in the cutting process. This is just a way to be a little more careful. I will be spending time on how to cut a window mat next week. I will also introduce next week the most archival process for attaching the photograph and the mat: photo corners. I am putting these two techniques together, mat cutting and photo corners, because you need the window mat to hide the corners.

Attaching The Photograph To The Board

These methods are usable with prints that are going to be flush mounted, meaning that the print goes to the edge of the board, or some of them can be used to mount the image onto a larger board. These are relatively easy ways of mounting a print and they will do a nice job. However none of them is truly archival, because you need a method that is both chemically stable and also reversible. We'll wait till next week for that.

I want to start with a new product Gudy 831. This is an adhesive product that has passed the P.A.T. test. That means that it is not going to chemically effect the print. The product is from Neschen Americas, which also handles Seal products that we'll discuss soon. You can get a sample of this product from them through this e-mail: filmo@neschenamericas.com, please mention you are taking my class. If you're looking for this product and other P.A.T. products you might try [Talas](#) in addition to your regular supplier. I

really like this stuff; it will actually allow me to mount a fiber-based print flat!

One drawback though, it doesn't have much in the way of directions. I will demonstrate how I used the product, but I am sure there are other ways to approach it. Robert Pirsig wrote, "Assembly of Japanese bicycles requires great peace of mind." This is an idea that will work for many things including framing. I approached the product by attaching it to the print first. I did this because I could trim after I put the tissue on the print, giving me a clean edge and because it makes it easier to flatten fiber base prints.

I used a sheet of glass to allow me to flatten the print in sections. I used a brayer for this. When I did a smaller ink-jet print I attached the print as one unit, from the inside out.



Curved Fiber Print
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Mounting Fiber B&W onto
Gudy Tissue
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An alternative method to get the tissue onto the print: hold the print in a U-shaped arc above an oversize piece of the Gudy tissue. Then place the print onto the tissue with the center of the print and center of the tissue coming together first. Slowly lay the rest of the print onto the tissue and squeegee or brayer from the center outward. You'll need to trim the excess tissue, before proceeding.



Attach Fiber
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Attach Ink-jet
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Then I turned back a couple of inches of the release paper.



Turned Back Release Paper

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Trim Print

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Next I trimmed the print so the edge of the print would be clean. I didn't have to do this with the ink-jet print because I was flush mounting it.

I attached the front edge of the print to the board.



Attaching Front Edge to Board

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Pull Release Paper Fiber
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Using Brayer
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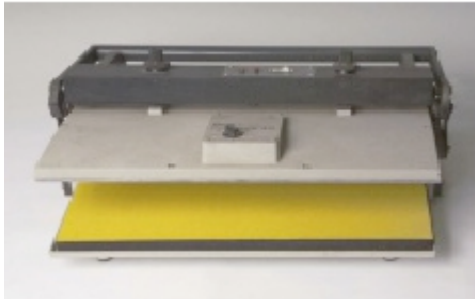
Next I pulled the release paper out from under the print. I used the brayer to put pressure on the print.



Weighted Print
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I put the prints under glass with weights to help the mount to cure. The Gudy 831 did a great job.

When I started doing photography we would just use a dry-mount press. This can be used without a mat since it stays flat and stays attached. This flattening effect is particularly useful for fiber based black and white prints. The press and the tissue are Seal products; they do a lot in the mounting business.



Seal Dry Mount Press
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This is like a 16"X20" iron and attaches the print to the board with a heat-activated adhesive tissue. The problem is that this could damage a traditional (C-print) color print and it probably will damage a dye-based inkjet. It does seem to work ok with a pigment based ink like Epson Ultra Chrome, but that is only my experience. The heat had a bad effect on the HP Premium Plus paper, although the ink might work well on another paper. In order to dry mount, the adhesive tissue (mounting tissue), which is not at all tacky at room temperature, is tacked onto the center of the back of the print with a small iron, called a tacking iron.



Tacking the mounting tissue to the print

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At this point I trim the tissue to just inside the edge of the print, to avoid showing an edge of mounting tissue. The print is then positioned onto the board and the corners are tacked to the mat board using the tacking iron.



Tacking the Print to the Board

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This sandwich, print/tissue/board, is then placed into a mounting press and pressure applied. I usually have a piece of seal release material in the mounting press to maintain cleanliness on the print. The print goes beneath the release material.



Loading a print into Dry-Mount Press

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I'll leave this in the press for about a minute at 200? Fahrenheit, and then I'll pull the print out and check to see if it has adhered properly. If the print is still coming up I'll repeat this process as often as needed. I use this process quite a bit although it is not the archival standard. I use it because it does a good job of mounting a black and white fiber based print. These prints are tough to get flat. This mounting method has been used for many years successfully. Some mounting tissue, Seal Fusion 4000, has been tested

for archival permanence. Dry mounting can be reversed with acetone. I have prints mounted more than 30 years ago that are still in good shape.

Other alternatives include an adhesive coated foam core board and an adhesive coated mat board. These are good products for quick display mounting, but they may eventually damage your print. The foam core is a good way to mount a large product without a professional press. Both these products can be handled in much the same manner. First make sure your work area is clean, you don't want dirt

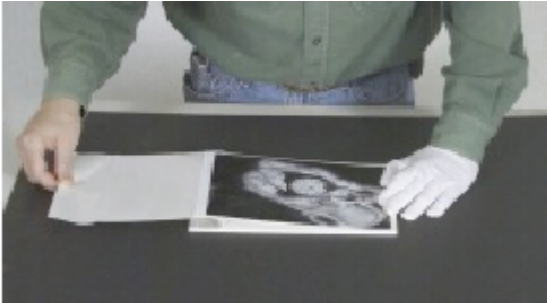


Pull back release paper to mount print onto board

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on an adhesive surface. Next fold back an edge of the release paper on one side of the board (foam core or board).

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Position one edge of your image against the uncovered edge of your board. Now pull the rest of the release paper out from under the image.

Pulling release paper from foam board

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Gently roll the image down onto the board. Use a squeegee or brayer (a brayer is a hard roller kind of like a paint roller) and slowly apply pressure from the center out.



Squeegee print from center out on foam board

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Pressure on mount board while bond cures.

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Finally put a weight on the piece for a day, this will insure a good bond.

Another good method is to use a Seal wide format laminator. These are professional machines for making very

large displays. Although they might not last forever they do make a heck of a trade show product! I went into a large format printer and got a couple of shots of this machine. Now these machines cost thousands, but this user paid for his laminator on the first job. I have a number of display prints in my office mounted with one of these laminators.



Seal Laminator, Mounting a Large Image

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There are a couple of methods that I don't really like. First is spray mount adhesive. It is messy, and hard to remove from skin. In order to use it you spray one surface, usually the print, and place it on the board. Use a squeegee or brayer to secure the print onto the board. I know people who swear that this works well for them, my results have been strictly temporary. The big problem is the overspray, the stuff always gets where I don't want it. Of course this is not chemically stable either. I have also used an ATG gun, which lays out a line of adhesive without a carrier. This is definitely not good for long-term maintenance of the print, but it is quick. It will work ok with a flat print, but a curled print is likely to be a problem.

Paper Cutters

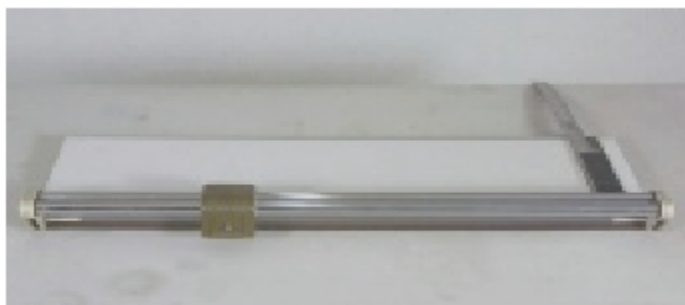
When you have attached your photo to a board by whatever means, you may need to trim your photo. If you are doing a flush mount with foam core, or mat board, you will want to be able to cut down the board. There are several ways to do this. My favorite is to use the straight cut device on my Logan mat cutter.



Logan mat cutter functions as paper cutter.

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Rotatrim Paper Cutter

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This is a simple matter of lining up the cutter on the straight edge of the image. This is not the only device I use for cutting prints, but it does a very good job. I also use a Rotatrim cutter, now marketed by Bogen.

This is a very fine tool that makes extremely precise cuts. You can see this and other [paper cutters at Calumet](#) One of the advantages of the Rotatrim cutter is that you can use it to cut mat board as well as prints. In addition to the mat cutter and the Rotatrim I also use a T-square and an X-Acto blade. In fact this is the only way I have of cutting Gator board, but it does take a while. This is because I have to cut repeatedly to get through this very tough board.



Cutter for large boards

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Of course there are commercial cutters designed for large board, they mount to the wall!

Keeping The Print On The Wall

The next problem is to attach the board to the wall. There are 2 easy ways to do this with a flush mounted print. The simplest is to attach Velcro to the print and to the wall.

I usually prefer to have the loop side of the Velcro on the print because it is softer. If I am taking the print on and off a display, prints may be stacked and the softer side is an advantage. Of course in a display the walls may be carpeted in a surface the hook will fit onto, so do not hesitate to use the hooks in this case.



Placing Velcro to mount print onto wall.

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Placing the print
onto the wall
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Pressing Velcro onto
wall
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First I position the photograph on the wall with both strips of Velcro, hook and loop, attached lightly. Then I separate the strips leaving one side on the wall. Now all I need to do is just press the piece on the wall down harder and reattach the print.

The other way I attach flush mounted prints to a wall is to attach a molding to the back of the board with hot-melt glue.



Wood molding to support
photograph
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I can then balance the molding on a screw or nail that I placed in the wall. I usually use a couple of additional small pieces of molding near the bottom of the print, these will keep the print an even distance from the wall. I like the look of this because the print is held off the wall. I am sure there are other methods of attaching a print to the wall, without a frame. What you want to look for is a method that will not fall apart over time. I hate seeing one of my prints fallen onto the floor. One other thing I have done in my studio is to make

small shelves for the prints, the advantage here is that you can easily change the display to match the interests of the client.



Studio Tour

Your Assignment: Mount a Print

Flush mount a print by what ever means appeals to you and take a picture of it mounted on the wall. This can be a temporary placement on the wall, maybe use Gaffers tape to hold it to the wall long enough to get the picture. Please take a shot of this and send it in. Whatever you decide to do, please include a list of the products you used.

Submit your **photo of your mounted print** with your list of products to the Campus Square by Wednesday, July 12, 2006.



Framing help!

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If you'd like me to critique your assignment, or discuss any details, you can arrange that by paying \$25 on my website. Please visit www.siskinphoto.com/workshop.php . I suppose you could also make a donation at the site.

I hope you find this class useful.

Thanks!

Have a good time. Send me some questions.

Thanks!

John

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