

Preparing prints for HPS Competitions

The conventional way for members of photographic societies to prepare prints is both complex and expensive - buying and using A3 printers, buying and using sophisticated cutters for window boards.

Here are some ideas and hints to reduce the complexity by buying prints and mount boards cut to size. There are a range of photo papers available, probably best to start with good 'normal' photo paper (200gsm?) in lustre, matt or silk. Better and heavier papers (260gsm?) are best used with window mounts rather than for surface mounting. The required JPG photo files should be saved at 'best quality' (and 300dpi), edited to match your chosen paper size. Consult your print supplier for advice about image sizing - by default, JPGs might be automatically fitted to the paper size.

1. Surface mounting prints

The classic format for mounting photographic prints is to use 'window mounts' requiring two mount boards with a window that matches the image size. The choice is to cut the window to suite the print or to crop images to a preferred window size.

Surface mounting is simpler and more cost effective where the print is glued, using a spray adhesive, to a single mount board. One visual trick is to add a 2 mm black or dark border to the image during photo editing. From a distance the result will look like a window mount!

For many competitions, photographic clubs standardise on mounts that are 50 cm by 40 cm (an evolution from 20" by 16") with the image size and aspect ratios determined by the author. Unless requested otherwise, mount boards may be of any colour.

In the UK photographic print sizes are usually specified in inches. A very versatile size for surface mounting is 16" by 12" (406mm by 304mm) with images cut out from the photo paper for mounting. Especially when a print has been given a coloured border, it is advisable not to use either the maximum paper width or the maximum paper height in case there is any small misalignment (or 2 to 3 mm 'bleed') during printing.

Prints should always be mounted with equal margins left and right with the lower margin larger than the top margin. Image size and composition allowing, it is good to have the top margin the same size as the side margins, but centralising prints on the board is acceptable.

Before finalising the print sizes, try alternative sizes and layouts in your photo-editing software. It's not necessary to use 'standard' aspect ratios but, if appropriate, image sizes to consider for landscape formats are:

aspect ratio 3 to 2: image size 384mm by 256mm (plus optional 2mm dark border?)

aspect ratio 4 to 3: image size 360mm by 270mm (plus optional 2mm dark border?)

Alternatively try side margins of 5 to 6 cm - landscape image widths 380mm to 400mm.

For surface mounting, cheap sprays are usually best avoided unless successfully tested beforehand. They can result in lumpy glue and spoil the look of the mounted print. The well proven brand is 3m who sell spray cans in 200ml or 500ml and either permanent (red can) or repositionable (blue can). The latter is less risky and usually ok for photo competition entries! Both sizes are expensive, but the larger one is better value.

Place **each** print to be sprayed on large sheets of **clean** newspaper.
Best sprayed in a well-ventilated area.

Correctly positioning and aligning the prints on the board is critical. Unless you buy a 'framing square' (an L-shaped 'double ruler') a simple approach is to accurately mark two pencil dots near the top two corners of the required print position. Place them just below and just inside where the print will be.

Here is how a 3:2 image might look with a top margin the same as the side margins:



The grey area represents the original 16" by 12" print.

If using spray adhesive is too daunting, one alternative is to carefully use double-sided tape. Another alternative is to buy large prints to the 50x40cm size. The backing board is hidden so it's colour and texture are irrelevant - and you can pick any suitable background colour!

2. Reusable window mounts

To get started producing window-mounted prints, if you regularly enter one or two prints into competitions, and can live with having standard aspect ratios, using pre-cut window boards might be an option. Mount boards with windows cut to your favourite image sizes could be used several times. In this case

- a) the printed images should be at least 2mm bigger all round than the window being used
- b) the print is easier to position if it does not have an integral border.

The photo paper may be attached to the window board using two generous strips of masking tape **on the back of** the top corners of the print. (Using two corners rather than four allows for expansion of the photo paper.) Six large glue dots, or double-sided tape, may be used to attached the two boards. A more robust option is to make the two boards hinged at the top by using tape as hinges on the insides.

Window mounted prints without a backing board are not recommended - the prints are too easily damaged.

3. Competitions allowing smaller prints

Competitions such as the HPS Monthly Print competition, where the mount size is not specified, might allow you to use your existing home printer. If you have a good A4 printer, all the suggestions given above could be tried at half size with 250mm by 200mm mount board.

4. Internet resources

Prints: DS Colour Labs, Stockport, SK4 1PL (0161 474 8680)

<https://dscolourlabs.co.uk/about/Online-Photo-Printing>

12"x16" prints from £1.17 plus delivery

Mount board: Paper Spectrum, Leicester, LE4 5RD (0116 268 1240)

<https://www.paperspectrum.co.uk/pre-cut-mount-board-21-c.asp>

In packs of 10 for about £13 plus delivery. They will supply, free of charge, a swatch with about 20 alternative mountboard colours and textures.

5. Local supplies

Prints: Square Studios, Harrogate, HG1 5BB (01423 313536)

<https://square-studios.co.uk/>

Specialises in fine art printing, using rolls 24" or 44" wide.

Mount board and cut windows: (sets of 4): Workhouse Framing, Starbeck, HG2 7JF

(01423 819347)

Mount board and cut windows: Skelf Frames Ltd, Tadcaster, LS24 9SG (01937 530623)

<https://www.skelfframes.co.uk/>

Collect from the shop next to their workshop.

They no longer have a stall in Knaresborough market.

Mount board and cut windows: Wydale Framing, Tadcaster, LS24 9NP (07971 469 145)

*Order by phone, collect from **Otley** market (Friday & Saturday)*

*or **Ripon** market (Thursday).*

The lower unit costs from internet suppliers are offset by the delivery charges, making one-off mounted prints very expensive. A batch of prints (6 or 8) reduces the cost per print and sharing purchases of mount board with other HPS members can offset delivery charges.

At the time of writing, depending upon the type and number of mounted prints, the cost **per competition print entry** may vary from about **£4** to over **£16**! Johnathan at Square Studios is able to provide 50x40cm prints and then (surface) mount them for £13 each – you just need to supply the JPG file on a memory stick or send the file by email. Andrew, at Wydale Framing, offers mountboards for £2 and window mounts for £3! – collect on market days.

Note: There are other local and internet resources. HPS members have used most of the ones listed above receiving good quality and service. Do please advise the HPS Competition Secretaries if you find and can recommend other suppliers. For more specific help on photo editing or preparing files, take a look at the Members' Area of the HPS web site - or just ask at any HPS meeting . . .