

Making prints from your digital images

It's not easy, and it's not cheap, to make prints from a digital camera that look as good and last as long as prints from a film camera.

It's not impossible, just difficult.

You need **all** of the following:

- A properly prepared picture file
- A good printer
- Good (photo quality) ink
- Photo quality paper

Start with a good picture file

If you set your camera to take lots of photos on its memory card, each photo will have little detail. While that's OK for display on the computer's monitor or to send via e-mail, you need more detail for high-quality prints.

For good prints set your camera to its HQ or SHQ setting. Those settings use all the pixels on the camera's image sensor and don't "squeeze" the resulting image to fit more on a card.

How good is good enough? For anything bigger than 4" x 5" prints you should have a file that's at least 1200 x 1600 pixels. That's what you get from a 2-megapixel camera. If you stand close to your subject, so you don't have to

crop your picture when you print it, you can make great prints any size you want from a 2-megapixel or larger file.

When you're taking pictures, menu selections which *increase the number* of pictures you get on a card *decrease the quality* of the resulting print.

Before you print your photo you can "tweak" it in your image editing software. Adjust the color and the contrast, and crop it to the shape you want.

The **last** thing before printing is to change the **size** of the photo to the size print you want - be very careful.

If you change the size description be sure you *don't resample the picture.*

Some photo software lets you change the size of a photo in a couple of ways. One is the description of the picture size (i.e., 12" x 18"), and one is the description of the picture resolution (i.e., 72 dpi). Be sure the square that says "resample" is unchecked or you could throw away your quality by reducing the number of pixels.

Choose a printer designed for photos.

They use a special cartridge of photo color inks, which has more colors than conventional printers. Just about all the photo printers can also perform well printing text.

How Inkjet Printers Work

Inkjet printers spray tiny drops of colored ink onto the paper to create the final color image. Most printers have only four colors to work with, the three so-called "subtractive primaries" of cyan, magenta, yellow, plus black.

"Photo Quality" printers use six ink colors so they can render photos better.

Inkjet printers don't mix the ink in the printer- they spray dots of the four colors of ink separately, and rely on our eyes' tendency to blur small details together, "averaging" the results. That's why makers of inkjet printer try to squeeze more Dots Per Inch - **DPI** - out of their machines - so the little clumps of ink run together in our vision.

Paper makes a difference

Photo-glossy paper makes a huge difference in even conventional inkjet printers, let alone photo-quality ones. We've got samples at the store. This is something you have to see in person.

Some printers work better with specific papers than with others. You're usually safe using the paper made by manufacturer of the printer - Epson paper for Epson printers, HP paper for HP printer, Kodak paper for Kodak or Lexmark printers.

I recommend the new papers from **Konica**. (Yes, we sell them)

You can buy papers with special textures from after-market makers.

Olympus offers a "Pictorico" line that's got a great canvas texture.

In the **printer control dialog box**, you've got to **tell your printer** that you will be using this premium paper. That way it knows to use less ink and to distribute it in the ideal manner for a photograph. Print speed will probably be much slower than when you're printing text - perhaps as long as 20 minutes for an 8x10.

The importance of permanence

Here's a nasty little secret that printer manufacturers don't like to admit:

Most inkjet prints fade! If you expose the output from most inkjet printers to bright light, they'll fade significantly in as little as a few months. (Leave them lying in direct sun, and they'll fade in a few days.) Storage in a frame, under glass, will help.

About cost: photo-quality prints on an inkjet printer will probably cost you about 65¢ for an 4" x 6" print. Most of that is for the ink. **You'll use a lot of ink - why do you think the printers are so cheap?**

Other types of printers:

Dye-sublimation printers use a big thermal ribbon. The paper makes four passes through the printer: one each for red, green and blue and a laminate that protects the print from harm. The resultant photos have no "dots" so they look like real photos - and last about as long. Dye sub printers used to cost over \$5,000 but now start under \$200.

Disadvantages? They make only one size print, and only one paper surface.

True photographic printers use a laser array or computer-controlled light valve system to "paint" photos onto color photographic paper, which is then developed in photo chemistry to give the longest-lived prints imaginable.

Disadvantages? Prices start at about \$100,000 and they must be kept busy - as they are at our store!

When you want the best prints possible - save time & money!

You can get **true photographic prints** from those same digital pictures.

Just bring your photos to us, on your camera's memory card, a floppy disk or a CD. We'll make beautiful prints made on **photographic paper**. They'll last longer, look better, and probably cost less than the total cost of doing it yourself. And you'll save a lot of time.

Making Great Prints From Your Digital Camera

by Chris Lydle

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Want to learn more?

Sign up for one of our digital photography courses!

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