

Making Mounts for Photographic Prints

1. Introduction

You can buy standard sized mounts. However, images are usually improved by cropping to remove irrelevant detail and correctly cropped images rarely conform to standard dimensions. Hence, it is worth learning how to produce your own mounts. Old mounts can sometimes be re-used to save time and cost.

You could simply cut mounts by sliding a mat cutter along a straight edge. However, it is time consuming to set up the straight edge each time, difficult to hold it in position and potentially hazardous if it slips when cutting.

This document describes one effective method of cutting photographic mounts using a Logan “Push Style” Mat Cutter or equivalent. This tool cuts the picture window with a bevel edge, has a retractable blade and a mark to enable accurate cut lengths. Alternative methods are also effective. I describe cutting a single mat. The method can be amended for cutting double mats¹.

The parts of a mount are illustrated at Annex A.

When cropping your photo, remember to leave in a few millimeters of redundant detail on each side to enable final cropping in your mount and prevent the photo falling through the “window opening²” that will display your photo. I crop about 4mm wider and longer than I intend to display, so that a small part of the printed image will be hidden under the mount. If you create your own prints, you could also, leave a few mm of white photo paper outside the area of your image. These margins also allow for minor cutting errors.

2. Safety Hints

Sharp blades ensure neat mounts but careless use can result nasty injuries. Hints:

- Maintain a tidy workspace.
- Eliminate trip hazards
- Retract cutting blades when not in use.
- Keep exposed cutting blades clear of body parts at all times, particularly when cutting
- Before cutting your board, always mount it on a semi-soft cutting surface such as a self healing plastic cutting board, scrap matt board or layers of newspaper.

3. Tool List

I recommend the following list of tools:

1. Logan Push Style Mat Cutter or equivalent equipped with a sharp blade
2. Box Cutter (Stanley Knife or equivalent) equipped with a sharp blade
3. Metal straight edge to be used as a cutting guide, about 1m in length
4. Quick-acting “G” clamp

¹ A Double Mat is a mount that uses two mounts, one on top of the other. The top most mount has a slightly larger picture aperture. This gives the mount assembly a classic decorative look that suits some photos.

² The window opening is the aperture in the mount that shows the visible portion of the photograph. Other parts of the photo are underneath the mount.

Making Mounts for Photographic Prints

5. “Self Healing” soft plastic cutting mat (multiple layers of newspaper or scrap mounting mat may be used instead)
6. Soft pencil and Eraser
7. Work bench or sturdy table
8. Rule and/ or tape measure
9. Mat cutting jig (See next section).

4. Mat Cutting Jig and Cutting Guides



The mat cutting jig makes it easier to cut neat mounts every time. The jig is similar but much larger than a joiners bench hook. Make one from a flat, smooth and sturdy MDF or plywood base-board and four pieces of timber approximately 30 × 18 mm in section as shown in the photograph. Please refer to **Annex B – Plan for Matt Cutting Jig** . Suitable scrap/ off-cuts can be used if available. The size of the base-board should be such as to hold the largest mount you plan to make. Three of the pieces of timber need to be firmly attached to the top of the board as stops to hold your matt steady when cutting it. Two on one of the short sides and one at right angles to them along the long edge of the base board. Notice the clearance gap between the two shorter stops. If a stop covered this area it would prevent the matt cutter completing its cut. Firmly attach the fourth length of timber to the base as the third stop to prevent the jig slipping forwards when you use it. Finish the jig with polyurethane, enamel paint or alternative hard wearing finish³.

Purchase and/ or make a set of laths that have the same width you plan to use for the borders around your photos⁴. The laths will be used as cutting guides for the Logan cutter. You would need one lath for each mount border width. They can be made from timber or MDF. The laths need to have smooth, straight and parallel long edges. If you plan to make double mounts, you would need to make or buy a second set of laths with a slightly different widths from the basic set.

³ Dirt and dust would become ingrained in untreated timber.

⁴ Laths need only be about 10 mm thick. The one shown in the photo is thicker than necessary because it was made from a piece of scrap.

Making Mounts for Photographic Prints

5. Procedure

5.1. Pre-Cutting the Mat Board

Purchased sheets of mat board are difficult to keep in good condition because they are large (Approx. 1040 × 820 mm) and awkward to handle and store. Also, cutting up large mat boards takes time and requires a lot of clear bench space. Hence, I recommend cutting mat boards into more manageable sizes as soon as you get them home. The smaller sheets can then be kept in good condition until you need to make your mounts. The smaller sheets are also easier and quicker to handle when making your mounts. Decide on the maximum print sizes you intend to use. For example, I mainly print on sheets of A4 (210 × 297 mm) and occasionally on A3 (297 × 420 mm). Allowing for a maximum border of 50 mm, I pre-cut my mats into the following sizes:

Print/ Mount	Suggested Maximum Mat Size (mm)	
	A4	A3
Print	210 × 297	297 × 420
Mount	310 × 397	397 × 520

Use the metal straight edge and Stanley knife to pre-cut up the board into more manageable sizes. Cut the board on a sturdy bench or table protected by a plastic cutting board⁵, many layers of newspaper or scrap mounting board⁶. To prevent the straight edge from slipping, use a quick-action “G” clamp to steady one end and hold the other by hand as shown in the next section.

5.2. Cutting to Final External Size.

5.2.1. Marking Out

This mat cutting method requires that the external dimensions of the mount are accurately related to the width of the borders and the displayed print dimensions. I carry out the following calculations to work out the mount size:

- Take for example a printed image of 260 × 415 mm and a border of 50mm.
- Less 4mm mounting allowance = window opening size to display the print of 256 × 411
- Border width = 50mm (It must be equal to the cutting guide lath you cut – if the lath is 49mm, make it 49 mm)
- Hence for a 50mm border/ cutting lath:

⁵ Plastic, self-healing cutting boards are available from art material and handicraft suppliers.

⁶ Using a soft sacrificial sheet to protect your bench top and jig also helps keep cutters sharp for longer.

Making Mounts for Photographic Prints

- Mount width = 356 (256mm window opening + 100mm borders (50mm × 2)).
- Mount length = 511 (411mm aperture length + 100mm for the borders).

5.2.2. Cutting Procedure

1. Place the mat board on a cutting board or sacrificial material such as scrap mat or layers of newspaper. If you like you can mount your cutting board on your jig.
2. Carefully mark out the correct external dimensions of the mount on the mat.
3. Place a cutting mat or sacrificial wads of paper under the mat board.
4. Place a metal straight edge along the cutting line using a clamp to help hold it steady.
5. Use a sharp Stanley Knife to cut the mount along the cutting line.
6. Repeat operations 3. – 5. until the mount is cut to its external size.



5.3. Marking Out and Cutting the Window Opening

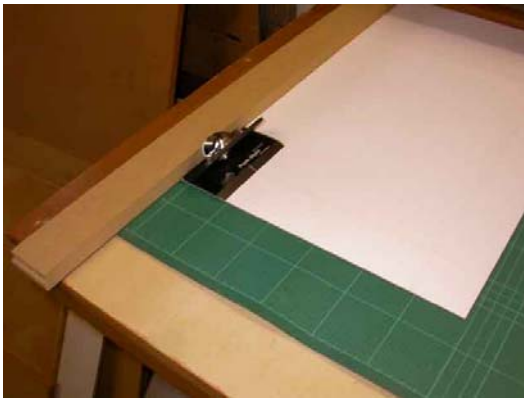
1. If you have not already done so, place the cutting mat (or scrap mat or layers of newspaper) on top of the jig hard against the stop battens.
2. Place your mount face down on the jig
3. Select the cutting guide lath. Its width needs to be equal to the desired border width of your mount.



4. Place your cutting guide lath on top of your mount, hard against the side and end stops as shown above
5. Lightly draw a line along the straight edge to show where to start and finish your cuts. Repeat this for the three other sides

Making Mounts for Photographic Prints

6. Place your matt cutter⁷ on top of your mount, hard against the guide lath. I recommend cutting the shortest sides of the window first⁸.
7. Line up the silver guide line⁹ on the cutter with the bottom border line marked on your mat.
8. Push the blade down into the mat.
9. Now push the cutter along the straight edge until the silver guide line on the cutter reaches the top border line on the mat.
10. Pull the blade holder upwards to retract the cutter then remove the cutter and place aside.
11. Reposition your mount to enable cutting the other short side, then the long sides of the window opening repeating operations 6 to 10 above.
12. If any of the cuts are incomplete, carefully repeat cutting actions as necessary. You may need to use a Stanley Knife to finalise a cut and free the discard.



13.

5.4. Assembling the Mounted Photo



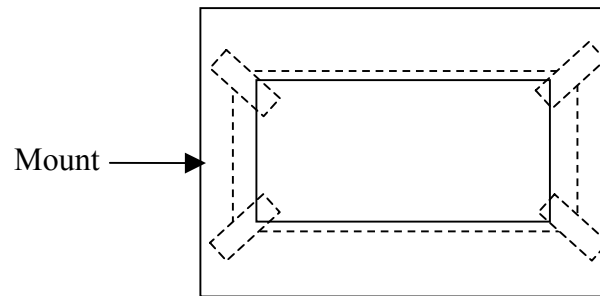
1. Place your photograph face down on a clean surface and attach tabs of 3M “Magic Tape” or equivalent to the photo but not the table!
2. Turn the photograph face up with the tabs sticky face up and lay it on the table.

⁷ Please also refer to instructions for your matt cutter.

⁸ This helps to prevent the cut-out falling out during handling which would otherwise damage the mount.

⁹ The guideline indicates the location of the tip of the cutting blade.

Making Mounts for Photographic Prints



3. Position the mount over the photograph. Carefully lower it onto the print so that the window area exposes the photo area you wish to display.
4. To make any minor adjustments, turn the mount over and carefully peel back the tabs. Then reposition the print.
5. When the print is positioned to your liking, use additional Magic Tape to secure the print to the mount.
6. Stick the cut-out discard piece on the back as a backing board, behind the window area and the print with vinyl adhesive tape. This helps strengthen the mount. Alternatively, make a full-sized backing board and stick this in place with two-sided adhesive tape¹⁰.
7. Finally, stick your print label to the back (Competition, Date, Title, Author, etc.). Make sure that the label is legible. It should be positioned such that the top of the label is orientated in the same direction as the top of the image¹¹.

6. Acknowledgements

This method of using a Logan cutter and cutting jig was demonstrated to me some years ago by Jack Hill of E J Art Framing, when he sold me the cutter.

The print mounting method came from Guy Parsons, past President of Pennant Hills Photographic Club Inc.

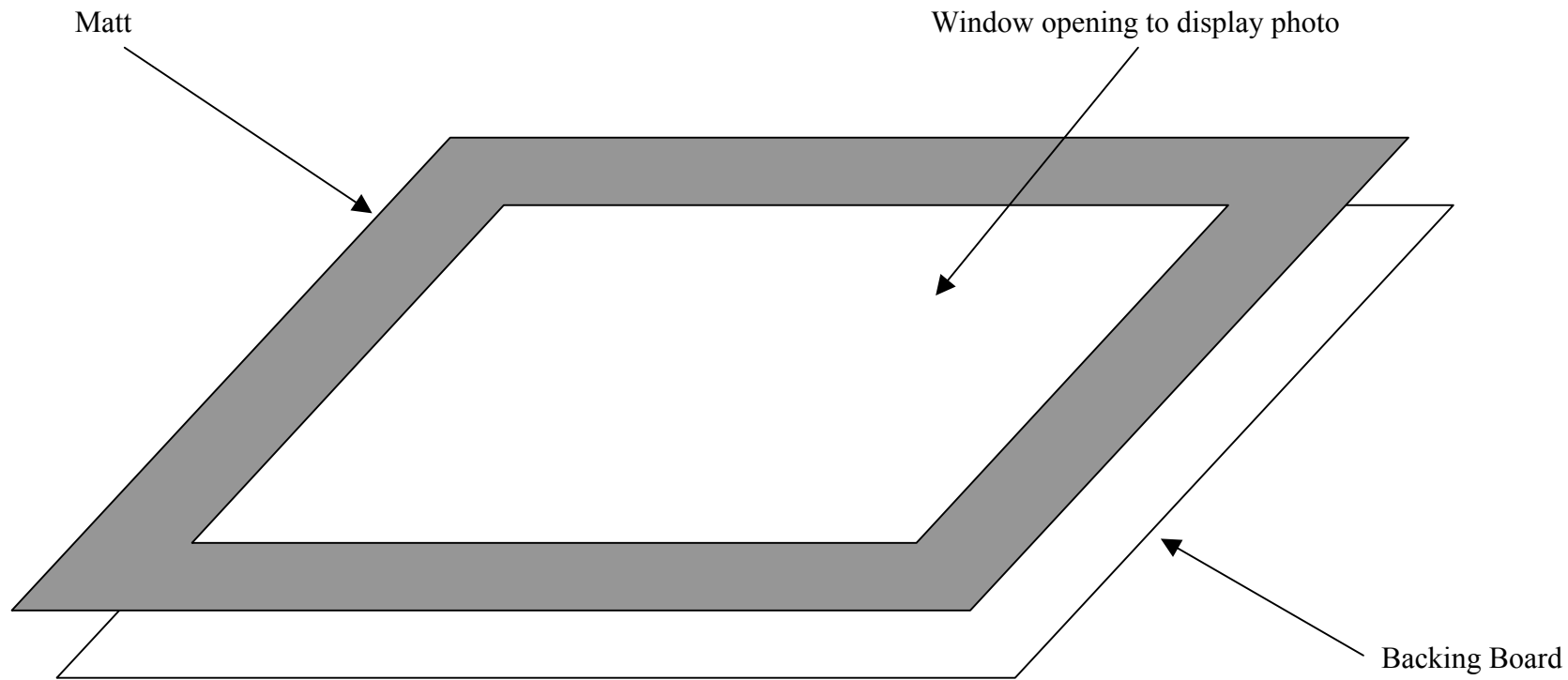
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¹⁰ There are a number of options for fixing a full-sized backing board to the mount.

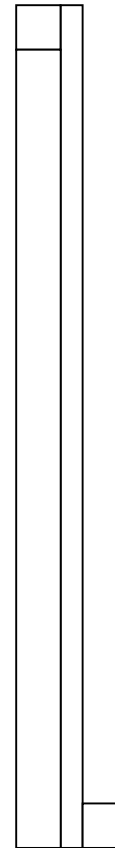
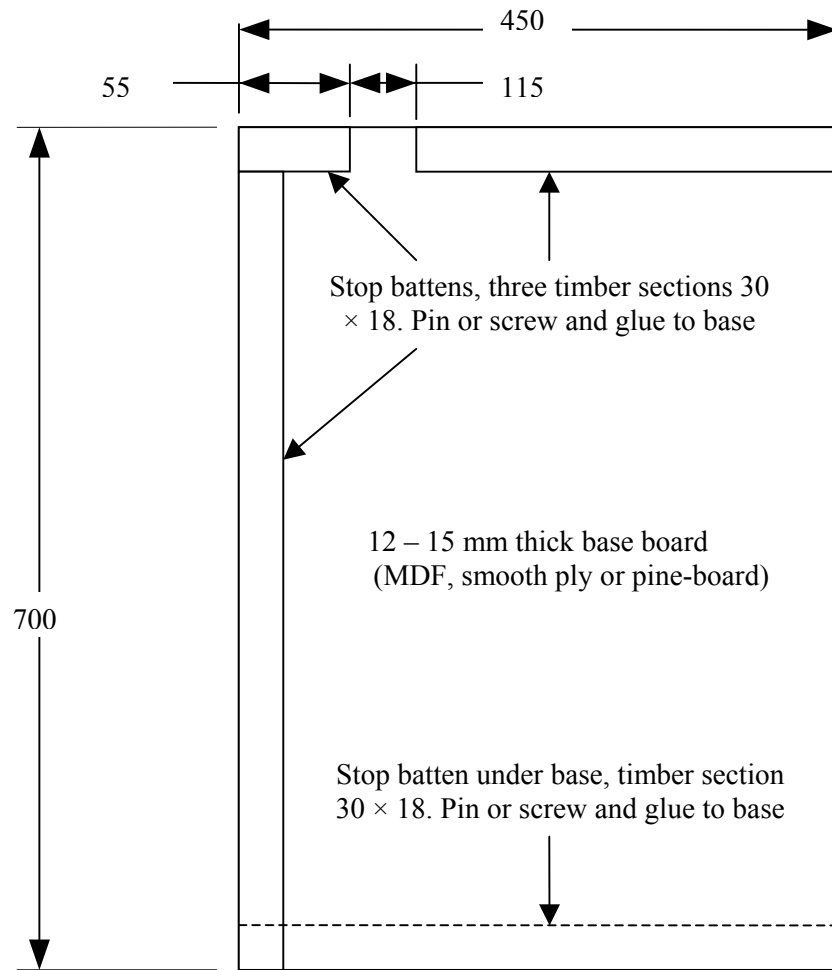
¹¹ Correct orientation ensures that more abstract images are displayed in the way the author intended.

Annex A – Parts of a Photographic Mount



Note: The backing board shown here is the same size as the matt. This results in a sturdy mount. A cheaper but less sturdy option is to re-use scrap piece cut out for the aperture as the backing board. This setup is suitable for competitions at your local club

Annex B – Plan for Matt Cutting Jig Suitable for A3 Prints



Notes:

1. All dimensions are in millimetres
2. All dimensions are nominal and the user should check that they will satisfy their particular requirements
3. If prints were restricted to A4, the overall plan dimensions of the jig could be reduced to approximately 580 × 365