

The overmat is a board with a window cut in it, placed over a print that has been attached to a backing board. The raised border around the print protects the print surface. The mat can be replaced if it is damaged or soiled without harming the print. It is a more formal way of presenting a photograph than dry mounting, and has the advantage of the print not being permanently attached to the board. With dry mounting, if the board is damaged, there is no way to remove the print. Overmatting is an archival way of presenting your work if you use the proper material.

### MATERIAL

1. Thoroughly washed, spotted and dry prints.
2. Mat board\* For archival purposes, it is best to use Museum Board. This board acid-free, so it will not yellow or damage your prints over time. It is also a solid color all the way through the board, not white on the surface and gray inside, so it makes a better overmat. Use heavy weight or "4 ply" as the overmat. Museum board comes in bright white, natural, which is a warm off-white, and ivory. Bright white is best for most photographs, although some people choose the natural for color prints because it makes the whites look whiter. It's up to you. Colored mats are usually taboo, unless you want the mat to be part of the art as in Barbara Kruger's images with a red frame.
3. linen tape
4. pencil, eraser, ruler, exacto knife.
5. mat cutter, either hand-held or table top model.

### STEPS

1. Carefully cut the mat board to its final outer dimensions. Standard sizes: 11x14, 14x17, 14x18, 16x20, 20x24, 22x28, 24x30 Many people try to standardize their sizes. This avoids the hodgepodge effect that can be created if there are twenty pictures in a portfolio and each one is matted to a different size.
2. Measure the picture exactly. Decide on the precise cropping at this point. If you do not want a reveal, and you want the window to cover the edge of the print, measure about 1/8" into the picture area.  
If you want a reveal around the print, add 1/8" or 1/4" to the picture's dimensions.
3. To calculate the side borders measurement, subtract the horizontal image measurement from the horizontal mat dimension and divide the result by two. When you draw the diagram, always measure from one side to the other, not from the edges in. That way, if there is a small mistake (say, from your board not being perfectly square), it will occur on the border, not in the window. When you calculate the top and bottom borders, the procedure is basically the same, except the print is not centered. Traditionally, the print is slightly raised, which makes the top border smaller than the bottom. One way of achieving this is to follow the side border procedure (subtract vertical dimension of image from vertical dimension of print, divide result by 2) then subtract 1/2" to 2" from the top dimension and add it to the bottom dimension.
4. Draw the window on the back of the board in pencil.
5. Double-check measurements.
6. Check and replace razor blade in the cutter if necessary.
7. Use a scrap piece of mat under your board to give you a better cut.
8. Place the board in the mat cutter with the window to the right of the blade. Line up your marks with the blade.
9. Start the cut with the blade a little over (1/8") the corner mark. Do not try to cut through the board with one cut. This will curve the corners. Score the board on the first cut, then cut a little deeper on the second pass, and cut through on the third pass.
10. Erase the guidelines or they will transfer to your print.
11. Sand or burnish any feathered edges on your print.
12. Hinge the mat with gummed linen tape.
13. Position the print on the backboard. Hold it in place with a weight or a clip
14. Use photo corners or a hinge to attach the print to the backing board.

\*A good source of archival materials is Light Impressions, Inc. They sell museum board (pre-cut or whole sheets), clear polyester archival self-adhering mounting corners and permalife paper photo corners that are attached with linen tape. 1-800-828-6216