

TIP OF THE MONTH

Printing Because your picture's worth it! –

Margaret Smith

Preparing for printing

1) The picture file

Size - Check the size in Photoshop's image size box. For A4, file size should be about 15 MB.

For A3, around 30MB (if checking a JPEG file on the computer, it will be about ¼ of these sizes).

Use a resolution of 240 or 300 ppi and set the print size you want. Files can be made a little larger if need be but up-sizing too much reduces quality - if the file is too small, it's too small!

Tonality - Use levels/curves for this, if need be adjusting different areas to give a well-balanced picture.

Colour - Do this after tonality because changing contrast alters colours - they're usually about right when contrast has been sorted.

Contrast for prints generally needs to be a little higher than for screen because screens are backlit and paper has a lower dynamic range. So add a little more contrast for the print file.

Sharpening - Do this last and save an unsharpened version of the file in case to allow for later changes.

2) The hardware

The Printer - Printers sold as 'photo-printers' will have more colours of ink than general purpose printers. Printers for general work will have Cyan, Magenta, Yellow and Black cartridges.

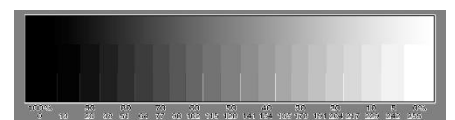
Photo-printers have Cyan, Light Cyan, Magenta, Light or Vivid Magenta, Yellow and Black - often Photo-black and Matte Black and usually a couple of Greys as well. (Light Black and Light, Light Black).

Nozzle checks can be carried out on all printers and are important as blocked nozzles give unexpected colour casts or stripy prints.

Choose the appropriate setting in the software that matches your kind of paper - there will be a drop-down menu in the driver to allow this.

The monitor/screen. If all the nozzles are clear and the settings are correct in the printer software but the print does not match the screen, then the problem is with the screen.

If the screen has OSD facility (on-screen display buttons) use this first with a greyscale step wedge.



Download this at: http://www.danes-picta.com/txt_GreyScales.htm

Then calibrate for colour. SPG has a screen calibrator which is free to borrow.

Doing all this should yield results which are pretty near to what you want, but it's still worth printing out a smaller version of the picture as a test print (use the same paper as intended for the final print).

However if you are happy with your system as it is - leave well alone!!!

3) The Paper and Ink.

Consistency is the watchword here. Epson, Canon, Ilford, etc. papers will not really vary much from batch to batch, but market, supermarket and attractive internet deals may source paper from anywhere and change suppliers at will.

There is less variation in inks, but continually changing may cause problems.

Prints fade. Over time, all photographs will fade, especially when exposed to light e.g. when hung on the wall. The acid content of ordinary inkjet papers will react with the inks, and daylight will bleach them. Archival inks and papers have much lower acid content and will better withstand fading. Most claim a life of around 85 years and this can be prolonged by museum grade storage, but be aware - they will all still fade in the end!

This means using specialist papers and inks sold to last. Art Papers This is where the fun starts!

Ink Modern inks can be pigment based or dye based.

The best archival printing is achieved using pigment inks on acid free paper. (Be aware that the term 'giclee' is a rather loose one - this article may be of interest <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Gicl%C3%A9e>)

Paper There are many different paper manufactures: *Ilford, Hannemuhle, Inora, Photopaper Direct, Permajet, Fototspeed, Somerset*, to name but a few.

All do glossy, satin, matt papers and offer a variety of textured finishes.

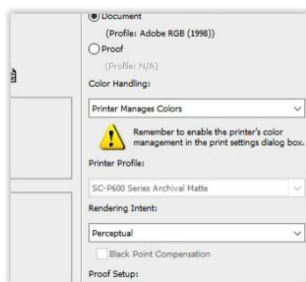
It's a case of play about and take your choice. There are no rights and wrongs here - it very much depends what you want from your picture.

However, they all share the same general characteristics.

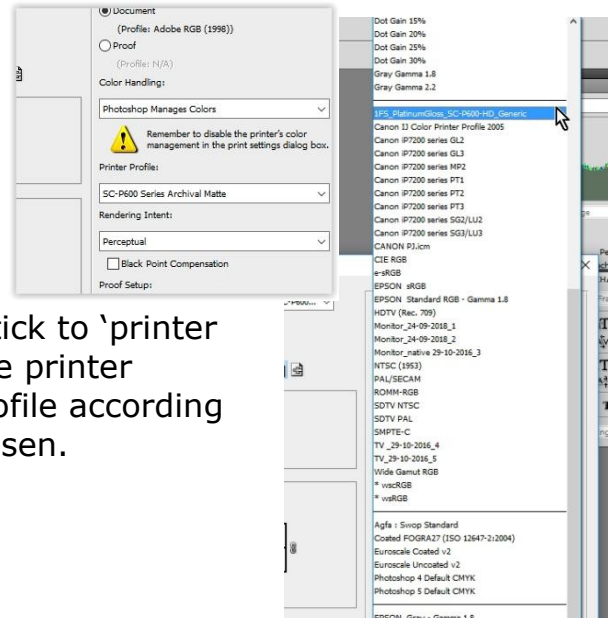
Specialist papers are typically thicker and made from paper, cotton rag or some mix of these - they have a lower acid content - often none at all - and this means they don't attack the dyes in the ink to the same extent, thus giving greater longevity.

Their manufacturers supply a *profile* for these papers - you can download a 'generic profile' which will work reasonably well on most set-ups, or have a bespoke profile created for your system. This is worth doing. It's free, it saves paper wastage because you get better results first time, and it also ensures that only the required amount of ink is used to produce the image, eliminating over-inking and bronzing. It means you can get significantly more prints from your ink - always a consideration.

If you do use profiled paper, tell the system that 'Photoshop manages colours' and choose the correct profile from the inevitable menu in the printer.



Don't venture into this area otherwise though. If using non-art papers, stick to 'printer manages colours' and the printer software will select the profile according to the paper you have chosen.



Art papers add greater depth and richness to the prints. The blacks are less dense black on matt papers than on gloss, and the paper base is a little less white so photos print at slightly lower contrast. It can be surprising that a flatter image often works better on gloss paper while matt papers are generally better for higher contrast prints that you want to tone down a bit.

When the print is behind glass, the surface characteristics are obviously masked, but the contrast considerations stay the same.

Monochrome

It is well-nigh impossible to achieve neutral Black and White on a general purpose printer. Subtle bleeding from the colour inks and an inadequate range of blacks and grey tones often result in unwanted colour casts, usually green or magenta.

For BW printing you need 3 or 4 black and grey inks for smooth tonal transitions in the grey tones. Typically such a printer will have Photo Black for use on gloss papers, Matte Black for matt papers and 2 different greys.

**But you only do your own printing if you enjoy it
- if it's FUN
For the YPU, PAGB, our own exhibition, the Folly
exhibition trade printing is fine.**

However you do it, now you've got your pic in your hot little hand, what next?

Presentation:

Mounting prints is highly desirable. It shows that you value your images if they're worth taking the trouble to mount them, and it helps to protect them from creasing and from scuff marks.

For temporary mounting, e.g. for our SPG exhibition, where work will be framed for a short time only, one strip of masking tape is fine - please not 'low-tack' as that will lose its grip and the print will slip.

Where the mounted prints get a fair bit of handling as in the YPU selection process, tape all round and make sure tape is secure and won't catch on or stick to other prints.

Photos for sale should ideally be mounted and presented, with a board-back, in a clear-face sleeve. SPG has a few of these we can sell to you.

Sizes YPU requires 40cm x 50cm. This does not mean that with only an A4 printer you are barred. A small print in a large mount can look very effective. Or multiple small prints can be presented in one mount and, of course, you can have whatever shape you want within that standard mount size.

Enjoy your photography and keep showing these prints!