

# Framing Fundamentals

Khristyne N. Dewey

## Surface Preparation

*There are many opportunities for an artist to save money, but this first step is not where you want to pinch pennies.*

Be sure that the surface upon which you will create is ready to receive and maintain your vision for years to come. It may not be obvious right away, but poor surface preparation is one of the primary reasons for paint peeling or cracking and paper discoloration or deterioration. The reason so many historical works still exist are, in part, due to extensive surface preparation.

Most artists and picture framers do not have the tools or expertise to restore a poorly prepared piece; nor does the average client have the funds to employ a practiced conservator in a rescue mission. Lackluster preparation can potentially pose issues during your artistic journey, costing you valuable time and resources. There is also the possibility of losing representation and clients if your work proves too difficult to handle or consistently requires corrective measures.

## Check Your Materials

- Is your surface archival?

*Archival materials will prevent rapid discoloration or deterioration over time. Be sure to check the specifications of your papers, boards, or panels.*

- Should your surface be mounted prior to being worked on? When applying wet media, are you prepared to handle any buckling or warping?

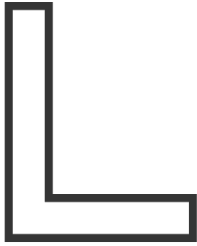
*A buckled or warped surface distracts and detracts from your work. It also causes issues when matting or framing. There are number pre-mounted surfaces available, but be sure to examine any product thoroughly before getting started.*

- Have you prepped your surface or substrate accordingly by using an appropriate sealer and/or primer?

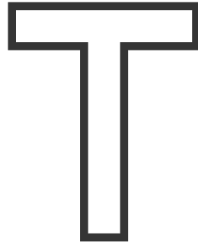
*When adhering anything to a wooden panel, be sure to seal the wood first using a sealer, such as **Golden's GAC 100**. Wood and wood pulp leach chemicals into your piece, degrading its structure.*

## Squared Away

*Whether you work on paper, panel, or canvas, your work should be “squared” if you plan on using traditional framing methods.*



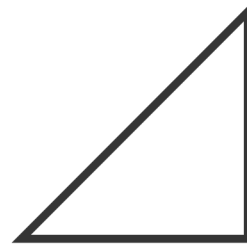
*L - Square*



*T - Square*



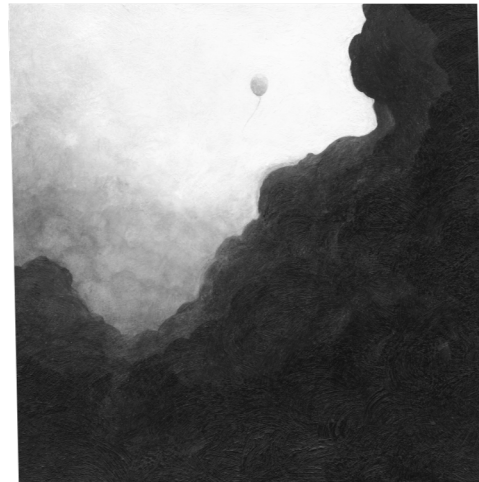
*Protractor*



*Angle Square*

The terms “square”, “squared”, or “squared up” has nothing to do with the shape of your surface or the length of each side. Instead, it refers to the angles of your corners.

Your work should have 90° corners. The easiest way to check for this is using a square or protractor, *pictured above*. This detail is important in the framing process as it ensure that your work will fit correctly into a frame and not appear crooked. You can find squares at any hardware store or art supply store.



*Can you spot the difference between these two pieces?*

*Let's place them in a float frame and see what happens.*



*If you look closely, you can see that the sides of the artwork on the left are parallel with the sides of the frame. Whereas, the sides of the artwork on the right, because they are not actually square, are crooked on the left and right.*

One of the most common framing methods for paper, panel, and canvases is to “float” the piece. This method is popular not only for its minimalist look, but also for saving money on framing materials.

If you are purchasing pre-cut panels or pre-stretched canvases, make sure you are not receiving crooked or bowed product. There are limited methods to addressing such issues, none of which are quick or convenient.

**Remember, even if your sides are all the same length, that does not mean your piece is actually square.**

# Mounting

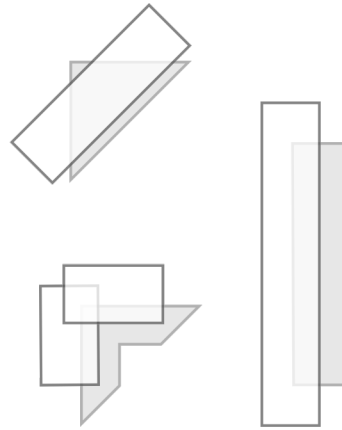
*Shop around to find the best deals on your materials. I have recommended some brands to use, but the cheapest method for obtaining their products is sometimes their official site and other times third party suppliers who tack on additional discounts and deals, such as free shipping.*

*Acquiring official business licensing may also make you eligible for wholesale pricing or tax exemption, depending on the supplier.*

## Photo Corners and Mounting Strips

Perhaps the most archival option there is, photo corners and other similar mounting strips keep your piece in place without directly adhering to your work.

It is recommended that if using this method, you tape over the photo corner's surface. *See diagrams to the right.* Heavy pieces or rough handling can cause their edges to split open because their seams are so fine.



## Glue and Liquid Adhesives

Any adhesives should be removable and acid free. Some products I recommend checking out are **LINECO's PH Neutral Adhesive** and **GOLDEN's Gel Mediums**.

Be sure you are sealing any wooden surfaces with a substrate sealer first, such as **GOLDEN's GAC 100**. Sealing wood helps protect your work from the chemicals and polymers inherent in the wood itself.

## Tape and Adhesive Strips

For a list of artwork safe tape selections, check out: [lineco.com/framing-products/framing-tapes](http://lineco.com/framing-products/framing-tapes)

Under no circumstances should you use packing tape, Scotch tape, duct tape, or similar “cheap” alternatives when you mount your artwork. The chemicals in these products not only cause discoloration, but they

degrade rapidly.

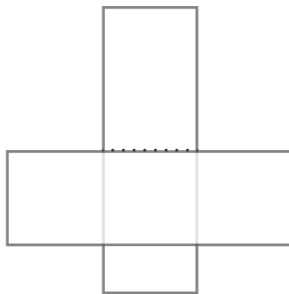
Do not use “tape rolls” for mounting work. This method is prone to failure if being used to hold up the weight of a piece. Tape rolls are fine for small, non-load bearing refinements, like tacking down a troublesome corner.

In rare cases where your surface or medium causes difficulty with tape adhesion and you’ve determined it is not due to improper application or incorrect tape choice, rub a minimal amount of archival glue or other appropriate adhesives over the surface of the tape. Tape adhesion problems can happen if oil-based or waxy mediums bleed through the back of your piece or you’re mounting to fabric matboards and other substrates with unique textures.

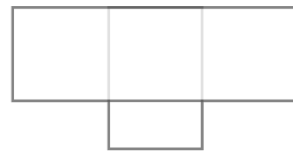
## Creating a Hinge



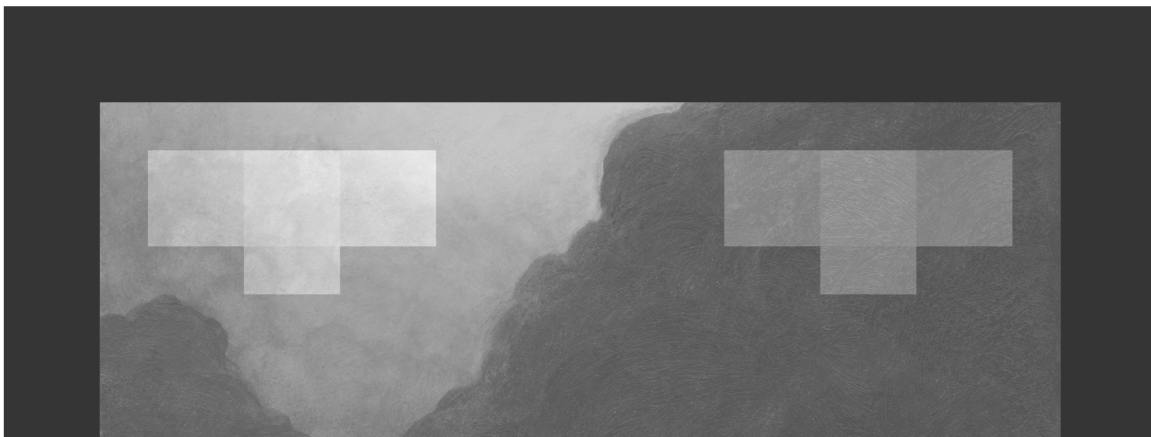
Crease the center of your adhesive stripe. Make sure to fold with the adhesive facing outward.



Adhere your strip to the mounting surface and secure it with an additional horizontal strip of tape.



Fold the top of your vertical strip over, with the adhesive facing outward. A minimum of two strips is needed for mounting your work, see the illustration below.



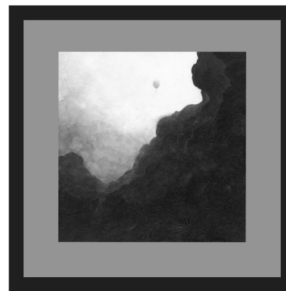
*Above is a demonstration of the hinges behind a work of art. Make sure your mounting strips have been positioned so as to be hidden behind your artwork.*

# Matting Styles

You can cut mats into all sorts of shapes and sizes, but keep in mind that your matboard and frame should never be too close to the same width. Give your work space to breathe. When they get too similar in width, it creates the illusion of stripes around your work and distracts the viewer.



VS



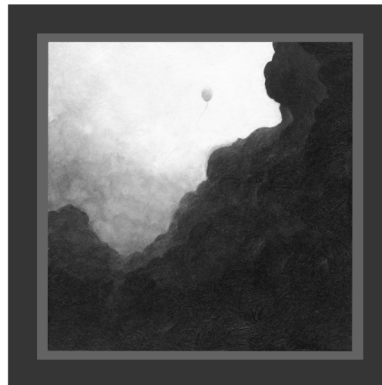
## Standard Cut Mat



In this method, the mat overlaps the surface of the piece and prevents glass or acrylic from contacting your work. *The dotted line to the left shows the edge of your work beneath the mat.*

Mats can be cut into all sorts of shapes, sizes, and dimensions. Knowing your mat opening in advance can help you in the creation of your work's composition and ensure details do not get covered during the framing process.

## Float Mat



When floating on a mat, your piece is visible in its entirety, allowing you to show off deckled edges or help reduce the frame size.

Use the hinging method from the previous page or adhere a wooden panel directly to your mat using an adhesive.

## Raised and Sink Mats

These next two methods, like the float mount, are recommended when framing loose or dusty surfaces; such as charcoal, graphite, or pastel.



### Raised Mat

1. Mount your work to a piece of matboard or foamcore.
2. Cut the opening of your top mat so that it overlaps your work, but don't attach it yet. *The dotted line above shows the edge of your work beneath the mat.*
3. Add foamcore to the back of your cut mat. Be sure the foamcore overlaps your image and hides any photo corners or hinges, but also be sure to set it back far enough from your mat opening so that you barely see it.
4. With the foamcore placed on the back of your cut mat, you may now attach your cut mat. What you're left with is a recessed channel to collect any material that may drop from your piece.
5. To better ensure particulates drop into the channel, frame behind glass or an anti-static acrylic, such as **TRU VUE Optium Museum Acrylic®**



### Raised Sink Mat

1. Float mount your work to a piece of uncut matboard identical to your top mat.
2. Cut the opening of your top mat so that it is wider than your work.
3. Now add foamcore to the back of your top mat. Be sure to set it back far enough from your mat opening so that you don't see it.
4. With the foamcore placed on the back of your top mat, you may now attach your top mat. What you're left with is a recessed channel to collect any material that may drop from your piece.
5. To better ensure particulates drop into the channel, frame behind glass or an anti-static acrylic, such as **TRU VUE Optium Museum Acrylic®**

# Framing Styles

## Standard



Traditional, but  
Extremely Versatile

*You can put anything into a standard frame, and I do mean anything.*

*From something as complex as a model train, to the weight of uniforms and large books, to the depth of a stretched canvas, you can put anything into a deep enough frame with the right tools and patience.*

*Particularly deep frames are known as “shadow boxes” and some can be purchased off the shelf with the glass and side walls already secured. However, you can give any frame this look by building your own liners using foamcore, matboard, wood, or any combination thereof.*

## Format



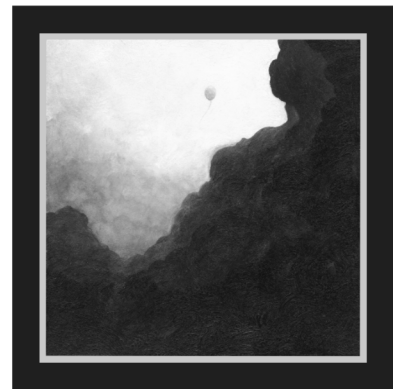
Barely Perceptible and  
Incredibly Cheap

*“Format” or “front-loading” frames are so thin, you can barely see them. They have a depth of approximately 1/8”, which is just enough space for a single sheet of paper floating on a piece of 4-ply matboard and set behind a very thin piece of acrylic or glass. You can also use them to hang 1/8” panels without glass.*

*Great for dropping off at local exhibitions, but not for shipping or long term protection. Simply drill holes along the inside edge to add wire*

*One available brand is **MCS**. Due to their fragility, be sure to order in advance in case of damaged product. In a pinch, make repairs using **Super Glue** and **JB Weld’s Plastic Weld**. Use a paint that adheres to plastic to refinish to your desired color.*

## Float



Saves Money Without  
Sacrificing Quality

*Not to be confused with the float mat, the float frame does away with matting and glazing. It is one of the most popular choices for works on panel or canvas.*

*You can even turn a standard frame into a float frame by building wooden spacers inside the frame.*

*Be sure that when floating your piece inside a float frame, that the surface of your piece sits just below the face of the frame. To do this, you may have to lift your artwork using wood or foamcore blocks.*

# Shipping Framed Work

## Choose a Plain Wooden Frame for Long Term Use

- Plain wooden frames are the easiest to repair after repeated uses. You can easily buy unfinished pine, birch, or oak frames in bulk for generic sizes.
- If you want a particular color or finish, you can use any number of furniture appropriate spray or brush-on materials. If you opt for a brush-on finish, it will be even easier to touch up if needed.
- Use **DAP Premium Wood Filler** for repairs. This stuff can be built up and finished to match the frame. Just one can will last you years, just make sure to hammer it closed after each use and don't leave it open for long.
- If and when buying pre-finished or off-the-shelf frames, examine them carefully; as many of these frames are not particularly durable, have some of the worst finishes (especially in the corners), and tend to drop particulates onto your piece when moved around too much
- You can use framer's points, glazier points, or nails to secure your piece inside a frame.
- If possible, avoid frames that utilize turn button fasteners on their backing boards. These may be convenient for loading a frame, but the channel that these fasteners slide into has a tendency to drop particulates behind your glazing, especially if the backing doesn't have a tight fit. If you must use one of these frames, be sure to seal the channel with tape or make sure your frame contents have a snug fit.



## Use Plexiglas or Acrylic Instead of Glass

- Plexiglas or acrylic is the way to go if you need such protection. Glass is prone to breaking with rough handling or sudden shifts in temperature.
- Cheap options for acrylic can be found at any hardware store and can be cut at home using a t-square and an acrylic cutting knife.
- TRU VUE Conservation Clear Acrylic® will provide UV protection and shatter resistance.
- TRU VUE Optium Museum Acrylic® offers the same UV protection and shatter resistance as Conservation Clear, but also drastically cuts down surface glare and static.

- If you do use glass, be sure to use a clear glass, UV protective glass, or museum glass. Check to be sure the glass does not add a blue or green tint to your piece.

## Special Considerations Based on Medium

- Regardless of medium, your work should never touch the surface of the glass or acrylic. Use a cut mat, framing spacers, or build some shadow box walls using foamcore or matboard to keep your work off the surface. Direct contact can cause sticking, smearing, or the medium being pulled off.
- For charcoal, pastel, and any other mediums prone to flaking or pulling away, consider “floating” or “sinking” your piece: *see framing techniques for more information*. Ideally, you would use TRU VUE Optium Museum Acrylic®, for the anti-static properties, but if you’re on a budget, consider using a spray fixative before framing behind a cheaper acrylic.

## Avoiding Damage

- Cheaper is not always better when it comes to shipping, especially if you don’t properly package your work to begin with. Carrier’s are under an immense amount of pressure and that can lead to poor handling. It’s not enough to slap a FRAGILE sticker on your box. Make sure there is at least two inches of padding between your work and the edge of the box.
- The slowest shipping, which is often the cheapest, is not always recommended; especially if your mediums are prone to getting tacky or softening in the heat.
- Avoid sending work that hasn’t fully dried or cured; think oil-based mediums and waxes.