

Mastering Mounting: Tools

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When the phrase “tools of the trade” is used, often the image that comes to mind are hand tools used to create or produce an end product within a particular industry. When picture framing is that trade and in particular, mounting is the subject, the tools may also include materials, equipment and procedures. Let’s review some of the basics when it comes to our “tools of the trade.”



WORKING AREA

I can’t stress the idea of “clean area—clean process” enough. By maintaining as clean and dirt-free an environment as possible, you mountings will have fewer (or hopefully no) dirt particles beneath papers or photos. Lighting is probably the most important element here. If you can’t see the dirt, wrinkles, or potential problems, you’ll never be able to prevent them.

TOOLS

In preparation for mounting, assorted tools need to be organized and nearby. Strategically placed racks or drawers will make life more organized when everything has a place whether it is in use or not. Basic hand tools, regardless

of the mounting method, will often include cutters, brushes of various sizes, brayers, and weights.

Individuals will also have their specific and favorite tools of choice: bone burnishers, Snitty® or Zippy® cutters (for tissue adhesives), a soft 4" hake brush for cooked starch paste application, self-healing mats as a surface to cut on, dulled and recycled glass scraps for wet adhesive application, a well-washed lint-free rag for clearing materials of dust particles, and/or a static-free brush or air system for blowing away unwanted dust particles.

WET MOUNTING TOOLS

Tools will vary depending upon the mounting procedure to be used. Wet glues are commonly applied by evenly brushing adhesive onto the art or substrate with a slightly stiff brush. Thicker pastes may require a soft brayer or rubber roller to even out the adhesive on a glass palette prior to application. A spray bottle for misting the papers is suggested to expand porous materials prior to mounting to match the expansion of the substrate through adhesive moisture. A sponge for either paper moistening and/or clean up will also be needed.

If the wet procedure chosen is a conservation method using starch pastes, additional equipment might

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also include a microwave oven or hot plate for cooking the paste and a softer hake brush for the application.

SPRAY ADHESIVES

The tools involved when using sprays are also fairly basic, and include the spray adhesive, air mask, accordion tray for adhesive application, screened-off area to control overspray (or optional spray booth) and ventilation system geared to OSHA health standards.

Rubber brayers and squeegees are among the same tools used for wet adhesives when applying pressure to create the initial bond after appropriate open time has been allowed. The same basic weighting requirements used when wet gluing are also necessary for most permanent mounting results. In both cases, use of a cold vacuum frame will not only expedite the bond but will create a tighter, more long-term, result.

PRESSURE-SENSITIVES

Pressure-sensitive adhesive applications require very little collaboration with tools in order to perform. They are dry and come applied to either a basic substrate or are available as a two-sided film with release liners. A straightedge and hidden blade Snitty or exposed blade X-acto® cutter is needed to size the films, while a basic wall or mat cutter

would size pre-adhesived pressure sensitive substrates.

A squeegee, rubber brayer (if hand applying), roller applicator or vacuum frame may all be used to apply adequate pressure to activate the initial bond upon exposure to the art or photo project. A delayed set-up time for permanency runs 4 to 24 hours depending upon the procedure and application technique chosen. During this time the project should remain under weight to insure a long-term bond and help flatten the substrate.

DRY MOUNTING

When considering the tools required for dry mounting, presses often leap to mind. The mechanical softbed press, hardbed press, or hot vacuum press are major pieces of equipment required to dry mount, but they aren't really tools (they're equipment). Additional tools, however, do include cutters, rulers, self-healing mats or glass cutting surface for tissues and release materials in the form of papers, boards and mylar films, and tacking iron. During the mounting process, anti-static brushes, lint-free rags and adequate space to work under good lighting are almost as important as which adhesive to use.

Additional tools also include those required for clean mounting techniques and daily maintenance.

Solvents and platen cleaners for maintenance of the equipment should be kept on hand for removing unwanted adhesives that have found their way to the heated platen surface, and might be considered required tools (or maybe materials). Old mat cutting blades are also handy for removing adhesive from glass-topped vacuum systems.

Even with the application of heated pressure during bonding, some dry mount adhesives actually create their bond as they cool under a weight, making weighting a key part of the process.

WEIGHTING

The final step of mounting—regardless of the adhesive or application—is placing the project under a weight of $\frac{1}{8}$ " plate glass or metal. This ensures proper bonding during drying or cooling and encourages flattening or reflattening of the substrate.

Felted weights are available commercially made or may be easily constructed by adhering a piece of felt the full size of the glass to the bottom. This serves as a soft absorbent pad that helps allow for air to circulate beneath the glass during cooling. Without air circulation, high levels of moisture may create condensation during the cooling process which could effect the long-term bond. Weights are just as important as good lighting.

KRAFT PAPER AND OTHER UNIVERSAL MATERIALS

Kraft paper is required for different reasons depending upon the technique and adhesive selected. In wet gluing, it serves as an absorbent, disposable paper to protect vacuum frames or weights from oozing adhesive. Besides acting as a type of release paper, in spray applications it may also be used as a protective cover sheet for spray surfaces to avoid excessive adhesive build up during application outside a spray booth. It is also needed to protect the glass-topped vacuum frame, if one is used. Other mounting techniques may need it to sleeve between large production projects when cooling numerous pieces beneath glass weights to absorb and/or prevent any moisture build-up.

Hand tools such as blades, knives, rulers, adhesive brushes, brayers, squeegees, tacking irons, dusting brushes, self healing mats and weights are all part of the basics required for good mounting technique. To be well-prepared, lint-free rags, anti-static wipes, Kraft paper, and release materials are often suggested.

Depending upon the particular mounting method chosen, dishes for mixing or clean up might also be needed. Cooking is required of many bulk wet applications using starch mixtures as well as softer brushes for application. Stiffer brushes for application may be needed for thicker wet pastes.

EQUIPMENT VARIES WITH PROCESSES, TOO

Are pieces of equipment “tools” too? Probably not, but they are worth mentioning. Though wet glue requires essentially no equipment, vacuum presses may be used if available. This holds true for spray and pressure sensitive applications as well. Use of a cold vacuum, and even heat in some cases, will speed the process and extend the longevity of most original bonds. If at all available, use of a cold frame is highly encouraged in conjunction with any cold mounting process.

Dry mounting utilizes heat as an intricate part of its bonding process. Presses vary by how much individual attention they require in relation to proper TTPM (Time, Temperature, Pressure, and Moisture), basic poundage per square inch (psi), and overall size of mounting they can accommodate. Mechanical presses average 2 to 5 psi depending upon whether they are hard or softbed, and can mount “in bites.”

Vacuum systems are entirely user-friendly adjusting automatically for PM (from TTPM), boast 12 to 14 psi, but are limited to the actual size within the vacuum seal. Some now have adjustable pressure settings to vary the overall psi. Vacuum presses are available as glass top and solid surface. The differences between them generally involve the depth of drop between relaxed rubber and platen, the pump

itself and suggested maintenance procedures. Check with individual manufacturers for specifics on each piece of equipment, maintenance, proper use and recommended tools.

COMFORT ZONE

The best way to count on good, clean, predictable mountings, regardless of whether wet, spray, pressure-sensitive or dry mounted, is to be truly comfortable with the procedure. “We have seen the enemy, and he is us” perfectly identifies the cause of most problems often surrounding use of materials and procedures when it comes to mounting. We are often our own worst enemy, almost always as a result of lack of understanding, lack of hands-on application, or the worst—lack of paying attention to detail.

To understand all aspects of any particular adhesive application of choice means plenty of mounting experience and even making mistakes. That means using, understanding and being comfortable with all related materials, equipment and “tools of the trade”! ■

Chris A. Paschke, CPF GCF, owns Designs Ink, Oxford, CT, featuring commercial and retail custom framing, product consultation, design and education. Specializing in mounting, matting and design creativity she works with numerous industry leaders. Watch for her new book, The Mounting and Laminating Handbook, scheduled for release this summer.