

# how to...

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## ...Choose Film Formats

You've chosen your photographer and are about to commission them; the question now is how do you want your pictures to be delivered? What you order now will have implications on how quickly the job is turned around, the overall cost as well as the quality and flexibility of your end product.

Your photographer will have favoured methods of working and these may depend on the services available to him or her in the area. So remember to check with them first. Here to help you are a glossary of terms and the implications of using each format.

Transparency —i.e.: positive, slide or 'tranny'.

Transparency film is processed using the E6 system to turn the film into positive images, which can be viewed on a light box or by holding them up to the light. They can be delivered mounted or without mounts and are most commonly recognised as slides which are put into projectors.

### Pros:

- 1) They produce the highest quality of image having gone through the least number of processes and can be used by printers without needing to be turned into prints.
- 2) They can be turned around very quickly; most professional labs have a 2-hour turnaround.
- 3) They are the cheapest form of obtaining a usable image.

They are light and easy to send or store.

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### Cons:

- 1) Once given away or lost, the image is gone. Many people believe that a sheet of transparencies is the same as a paper contact sheet and the pictures can be re-ordered. Remember that it is the actual film from the camera and the original is irreplaceable.
- 2) You can "back up" your transparencies by having them copied as dupes, printed or scanned into digital files but this will add to the cost of the commission. Magazines rarely return images sent to them and printers are often careless in their handling of original material, so give some thought to the long-term needs of your shoot and how varied your usage will be.
- 3) 35mm transparency can be difficult to view without a Lupe (magnifying eyepiece) and a light box. If you are going to be working with transparencies a lot these are essential items.

### Colour Negative Film;

This is exactly the same type of film as you would put into your own camera. It is processed using the C41 system and can be printed either as prints or as a contact sheet from which images can be chosen for printing at a later date.

Because it needs to be printed before it can be used, the quality is technically not as good as transparencies. However for most uses this difference is negligible and should not be given much consideration.

### Pros:

- 1) If you primarily need lots of prints to hand out this is the cheapest and quickest method, so long as you order process & print. It is worth remembering that as soon as you order prints from pre-processed negatives, the price per print goes up dramatically. This makes working from contacts desirable only when you need a few prints rather than having the whole shoot printed or if you like your prints to be large or hand printed.
- 2) You never send out your originals (which are the negatives), and can keep them safely filed away for future use.

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- 3) Many photographers prefer to use colour negative film as this can be manipulated in the print stage to redress any colour imbalance or exposure problems. However, these corrections would be made as individual handprints and would not apply to film being ordered as process & print.

### Cons:

- 1) It can take longer to turn around than transparency film and may not be suitable for PR work where results are needed ASAP. (Professional services offer a 6-hour turnaround but this can be longer if demand is high).
- 2) It is more expensive initially than transparency film and additional prints may still need to be made of the key shots.

### Black & White Negative Film

Once the standard medium for most work this is now seen as a specialist format. It is now hardly ever used for standard presswork as it loses hands down in turnaround time and cost and will often not be considered for publication by magazines that want to see colour pictures on their pages.

However, if you want that arty, hand printed black & white look, many photographers feel there is no substitute. Consult your photographer for prices and turnaround times, as this is now very much a bespoke service.

### Digital Services

Digital cameras require no film, the image being captured and stored on cards, which can be uploaded to computers. These scans can then be used directly for output by printers and can be printed and manipulated on any computer that can handle large files.

This is undoubtedly the future of photography and has already created exciting opportunities for the capture and distribution of pictures. However, the technology involved and the implications of this are changing constantly, even on a monthly basis.

It is also an area that is not as simple as it might seem. Firstly, you should distinguish between digital capture and digital storage.

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Digital capture involves taking pictures with a digital camera so that the "original" is the JPEG or TIFF file. Digital storage involves the scanning of original prints, negatives or transparencies to create JPEG or TIFF files, which can then be stored on computer or more probably burnt onto CD.

### Pros for digital capture:

- 1) Images are available within seconds of being taken. At the moment photographers using digital cameras can upload pictures to a laptop, which can be plugged into a mobile phone and sent via email to picture desks within minutes.
- 2) For a typical PR event your photographer can take the pictures during the event and as you usher the last guest away your pictures are waiting on the laptop to be approved by you before being emailed to the appropriate clients.
- 3) No additional expense of prints or film or couriers (though your photographer may well have adjusted his expenses to compensate for the service provided and loss of additional income.)
- 4) Pictures need never be lost or mislaid again, countless copies being made for free and stored on archive systems, which need not be expensive.

### Cons for Digital Capture:

- 1) The quality of 35mm cameras at present is good enough only for presswork in small sizes and is unsuitable for brochure / exhibition use. This makes the use of 35 mm digital work useless except for those commissions, which you are certain, will only be needed for press usage.
- 2) Many photographers will not have digital cameras to work with. At present the top end digital cameras cost about 5 times the cost of conventional cameras and are still limited by the restrictions in quality outlined above. Until the technology is developed to put them on a par with conventional formats for all uses many photographers will not invest the sums required for such a short term investment but will wait until a camera is produced that will last the distance.

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### Pros for Digital Storage:

- 1) Pictures can be stored on files large enough to be reproduced for most usage, with the original still being available for the most demanding of circumstances.
- 2) Once scanned, pictures can be archived digitally and stored with as many copies as you wish being produced at little or no cost.
- 3) Pictures can be sent via email reducing time & costs for delivery.

### Cons for Digital Storage:

There really aren't any.

Though it is probably not cost effective to have entire shoots scanned to CD, selecting an edit from each shoot you do will ensure that the key pictures from shoots you are commissioning now will be preserved in the format you will be using in years to come. You will probably recoup the scanning cost in saved courier fees and print costs anyway. One cautionary note would be that your scans are only as good as the scanners used in the first place. Once again, this technology is always changing and becoming cheaper but try to rely on professional services rather than a scanner, which might be lying around the office unless you've done your homework and are sure of the quality.

Also keep an eye on the services professional labs are offering to put transparency and print films straight to CD. Although the file sizes are small at present, it is becoming cheaper all the time and the quality will only improve.

### To Conclude

All the formats talked about offer various choices, which are compromises between quality, turnaround time and cost. Talk to your photographer at the time of commissioning and they will help advise you on what to use but try to take a long-term view on the needs from a shoot. Many photographers will use more than one camera and may be able to shoot on more than one format, (although this can cause its own problems), and remember that a mix of shooting on film with a digital storage option can help in situations where speed and quality are both needed.