How to Mat a Photo
By Dan Hyde – March 15, 2017

So you want to enter one of your great photos in a photo contest but the rules say it must be matted. And you have never matted a photo! You could pay someone to mat it for you but that will cost MONEY. This note is to show you that it's easy to do yourself.

Supplies Needed: ¼ inch thick foam board, an appropriately sized pre-cut mat, double-sided tape, four photo corners, and a hanger for foam board back.

Roll of double-sided tape, hanger, and clear photo corner lying on white foam board next to a black pre-cut mat for a 5" by 7" photo.

All the supplies can be purchased at Brushstrokes, 340 Market Street, Lewisburg, PA. Their hours are 10 a.m. to 6 p.m. Monday through Thursday; 10 a.m. to 7 p.m. on Fridays; and 10 a.m. to 5 p.m. on Saturdays.

Tools needed: mat knife, ruler -- preferably a metal one --, pencil, scissors

Step 1: Using the mat knife and metal ruler, cut out a piece of foam board the same size and shape as the pre-cut mat. This will serve as the backing for the artwork. Be sure to protect the surface you are cutting on with a sheet of cardboard or an old board.

Step 2: You next want to attach the photo to the back of the pre-cut mat. Don't use glue or scotch tape! The glue may bleed and damage the surface of the photo. Scotch tape around the edges of the photo may cause the photo to wrinkle over

time due to changes in temperature and humidity. It's best to mount the photo so it can shift a little. I like to use four photo corners to hold the photo. They come in many colors and decorations. I like to use clear ones. It doesn't matter what color you use since they will be hidden from view. Since the photo is not attached by glue or tape, you can easily remove it later if needed.

A clear plastic photo corner with sticky side towards the front.

Start by placing one photo corner on the corner of the photo and press it to the back of the pre-cut mat so that the photo is properly aligned when viewed from the front. The beauty of photo corners is that you can lift off the one corner if you find the photo needs adjustment. When photo is properly aligned, add the other three photo corners. Press down on the four corners for a secure mount.

A roll of double-sided tape with outer plaid strip cut off.

Step 3: Now to add the foam board backing. Carefully peel back the plaid strip from the double-sided tape and with scissors cut off the plaid strip. Carefully lay
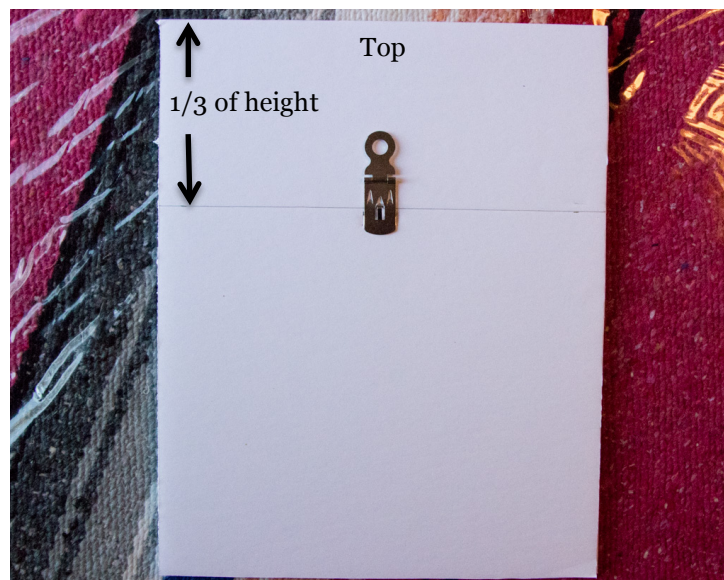
the plaid strip aside because you will want to place it back on the roll when you are finished with the double-sided tape.

Starting to pull off brown paper from one of the double-sided tape strips.

Cut off a 4 to 6 inch strip of brown-paper-covered double-sided tape and stick it on the back of the pre-cut mat about halfway below the photo and the bottom edge. Be careful because the tape is very sticky! Make sure the tape is nowhere near your photo. Cut out three more similar sized tape strips and attach above and on the two sides of the photo as shown in the picture above.

Carefully pull off the four strips of brown paper to reveal the glue. Now lower the foam board slowly, being careful to align it with the pre-cut mat. When the foam board comes in contact with the four glue strips, press the four areas down with your fingers for a good seal.

Back of artwork showing the placement of hanger. Top of artwork is up.

Step 4: Time to attach your hanger. Depending on the orientation of your photo, determine what side is "top." Measure down about 1/3 of matted picture's height from the top of the matted picture on both sides and draw a thin line on the back of the foam board. Measure and determine the center of the thin line and mark with your pencil. With the round loop of the hanger up, carefully press the hanger into the foam board.

Alternative Hanger: If you have a small and lightweight artwork, you might consider the above plastic hanger (also available at Brushstrokes) as an alternative to the metal one. It's cheaper but not as strong. As with the metal hanger, measure down 1/3 of artwork's height on both sides and place the plastic hanger in the center with the saw tooth opening up. Remove the protective paper before attaching the sticky side to the back of the artwork. This is also a good alternative if for some reason you did not use ¼ inch foam board as a back.

The finished matted photo hanging on a wall.