

Which Paper Cutter is Right for You?

by Andrew Darlow

Photographer and author Andrew Darlow helps you "cut" through the clutter.

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Cutting photographic and inkjet prints (and other materials) is not a favorite task for most photographers.

However, having the ability to cut your prints quickly, accurately, and safely, can save you a lot of time and money. The following suggestions and product recommendations are

based on my personal experience with a number of products over the last 10-15 years.

CUTTING TO THE CHASE

First, for very clean, precise cuts, I highly recommend the double-rail RotaTrim Mastercut Professional Rotary Cutter. These cutters are self-sharpening, extremely accurate and reliable even after years of use. They are ideal for cutting films, paper, and canvas before and after printing and come in widths from 12 to 54 inches. RotaTrim also makes larger trimmers (powered and non-powered). An excellent web page with information about RotaTrim's cutters, plus additional cutters and other accessories, can be found on [Bogen Imaging's web site](#). One unique accessory that you'll find there is the Rotatrim [multi-cut end stop](#) for cutting specific length sheets.

Another well-regarded brand that I've used successfully over the years is [Dahle](#). Dahle has multiple grades of cutters in many widths, including their Premium Rolling Trimmer, which is able to cut up to 30 sheets of paper, or 4-ply matboard. All of the Dahle rotary cutters I've seen in person and online will cut in both directions without any modifications.

In the case of the RotaTrim Mastercut cutters, bi-directional cutting capability is standard for the following models: M12T (for up to a 12-inch width), M15T (15-inch width) and M17T (17-inch width). However, the larger RotaTrim Mastercut cutters (models

M24T to M54T) require an overload plate be removed for bi-directional cutting. Please read the recommendations carefully from the company if you decide to make this modification to your cutter.



Photos courtesy Bogen Imaging, Dahle North America, and Making Memories, respectively.

(Left) The RotaTrim Mastercut Professional Rotary Cutter. (Center) The Dahle Premium Rolling Trimmer. (Right) The Making Memories Precision Paper Trimmer.

RotaTrim also recently introduced a single rail cutter, named the Monorail Rotary Paper Cutter. It comes in 13, 18, 26, 36, and 48-inch-wide models (priced from about \$150 to \$400 depending upon the size). Only one-way cutting is possible with this series of cutters, and they offer a more economical alternative to the RotaTrim Mastercut cutters.

VALUE JUDGEMENT

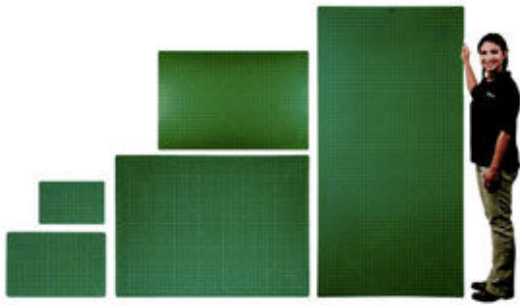
An inexpensive rotary cutter (about \$50) from [Making Memories](#), called the Precision Paper Trimmer, has a number of features worth noting: it can cut up to 12-inch wide materials; it can fold and be used in the folded and unfolded positions, which makes it portable and allows it to take up less space on a table when not in use; and it also comes with a thin magnetic ruler that holds paper more securely to the trimming board prior to cutting. I have used it extensively and I think that it is well made and offers a great value. It is very versatile due to its portability, and I also like using the magnetic ruler as a guide when cutting multiple sheets to the same size, or to hold paper more securely when cutting (the magnetic hold of the ruler is very strong). It is not as robust as cutters like the RotaTrim Mastercut, but I highly recommend it for cutting light-to medium-weight papers on-location, at home or in a studio or office.

Another popular type of cutter is the Guillotine cutter. I have found that these cutters can function well, but they are generally not as accurate as rotary cutters because of the way the blade can cause the paper to move slightly as it is cut. There are also some significant safety issues to consider compared with rotary trimmers, although some models have protection for the blade throughout the entire cut. I use guillotine cutters primarily for cutting cardboard and mat board because some boards can

damage rotary trimmers.

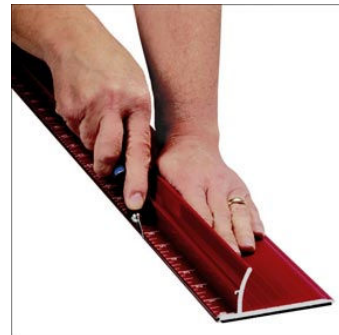
CUTTING THE BIG STUFF

Cutters that accommodate large sheets of foam board (or other materials) are generally expensive (over \$500), but they can be a lifesaver in high volume situations. A more flexible alternative that costs much less is to combine a self-healing cutting mat, safety ruler, and a good quality utility knife. This combination can be used on a table, or even a floor if necessary, and using all three makes cutting large sheets much easier.



Photos Courtesy SpeedPress Sign Supplies

The Speedpress Self Healing Magic Cutting Mat, shown in sizes up to 35.8 x 71.7 inches.



One of SpeedPress' Steel Edge Safety Rulers being demonstrated. A safety ruler can help avoid serious injury, and can also help make more precise cuts.

Several companies make good quality healing mats and safety rulers, and one that I recommend is [Speedpress](#). Their self-healing mats are available in sizes up to 6 × 12 feet, and they offer a few safety rulers, which can save your hands from potential injury. They also have a non-slip base that can help protect the material you are cutting while helping to keep the ruler steady during cuts. They have a new mat called the Magic Cutting Mat that, according to the company, allows you to cut without leaving visible marks. The company also sells centering rulers, which can help save time when measuring and making cuts.

SIZING OPTIONS

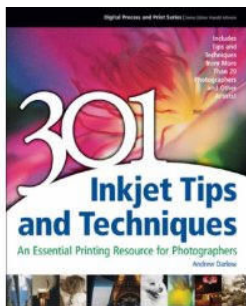
Having a high quality cutter (or multiple cutters) to cut paper, cardboard, canvas, and other materials allows for more paper size options.

For example, you can gang-up multiple images on single sheets of paper when sending them to a lab, or you can buy rolls of paper and pre-cut them in advance before loading them into your printer. Cutting your prints also allows you to get multiple print sizes from a single roll or box of paper. One thing to consider is that a 17x22 inch box of paper often does not cost much more than a 13x19 inch box of the same paper. By cutting the larger sheets down, you can create a mix of print sizes.



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An example of how a 17x22 inch sheet can be cut down to make multiple prints in different sizes.



Portions of this article were excerpted from Andrew Darlow's new book, **"301 Inkjet Tips and Techniques: An Essential Printing Resource for Photographers"** (Course Technology, PTR), which covers tips and techniques for prepping, printing and displaying prints made using inkjet printers.

To receive a tip a week from the book, as well as a resolution chart and article to help determine file sizes for printing, visit the book's companion site www.inkjettips.com.

Check out Andrew's upcoming workshops and webinars [HERE](#) and visit this page to see [Special Offers for Apogee Photo Readers](#).

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