

Get the picture

A photo printed at home is only as good as the paper you use – so which is best?

A recent survey by market research company Mintel found that nearly one in four of us is printing photos at home rather than using professional photo processors. But with dozens of special papers for printing photos available, it's very difficult to decide which one to buy.

Choosing the right paper

Your photos will only be as good as the paper you use, so you should always buy paper designed for printing photos rather than plain paper. Photo paper is treated with a special coating that prevents the ink from being absorbed into the paper.

Photo finish

Photo paper is available in different grades, generally called basic (often referred to as everyday, standard or regular) and premium. The key difference is the weight, given in grams per square metre (gsm). Premium paper is often heavier and denser, so will take more ink without soaking and is less likely to curl.

Another choice is finish. This is usually between gloss or matt, but it can also include high-gloss, soft-gloss, or semi-gloss, each denoting the amount of shine.

Our findings

With so many options, it's no surprise that prices vary hugely. We found some premium paper that cost almost six times as much as standard. So you can save money by choosing cheaper paper, but can it produce the same quality of photos? We put 19 different types of paper to the test to find out.

We discovered that you often get what you pay for. The premium papers came out on top for each printer model. Yet some cheaper, basic papers also did well.

Printer and paper match up

Just as importantly, we found that you're usually best off using the same brand of paper as the brand of printer that you own. This is because companies such as Canon and Epson formulate their printer, ink, and paper as a complete set.

However, paper from other companies can also give great results. For example, when used on the Canon machine, Fujifilm's premium paper produced the second-best photos on test (see tables, opposite).

Visit www.which.co.uk/photopaper for results of all 19 papers tested.

USING THE TABLES

The more stars the better.

Each paper was tested on four popular printers, using the original ink provided (except for the HP model, where we also tested the recommended photo ink cartridge).

As the papers perform differently on each printer we haven't given an overall score. Instead, we show the best and worst performing papers for each printer. We also show the performance of the basic and premium papers produced by the printer manufacturer, plus a good budget choice.

Price

We give a guide price that you can expect to pay for each page of paper. This is based on the price for the smallest pack size on the high street.

Test performance

Total print quality

Sharpness, quality and colour of the print.

Total technical Resistance to over-inking and smudging.

Score

This ignores price and is based on:

Total print quality	85%
Total technical	15%

Contacts

Canon 0870 514 3723
www.canon.co.uk

Epson
0871 222 6702
www.epson.co.uk

Fujifilm
0870 084 1310
www.fujifilm.co.uk

HP 0845 270 4142
www.hp.co.uk

Kodak
01442 261122
www.kodak.co.uk

Lexmark
0870 444 0044
www.lexmark.co.uk

Tesco
0800 505555
www.tesco.com

How we test



We test photo papers to the limit so your precious memories won't fade

Technical tests

The two pictures (left) show the difference in the quality of photos it is possible to print.

Therefore, our tests have to be as tough as possible. We leave a print to dry for at least 24 hours and then spray it with droplets of water. We dab the droplets with a tissue, allowing us to

judge whether the ink will smear or run. We also print a photo taken at sunset that includes a lot of dark areas. This lets us assess whether the paper struggles to reproduce detail when lots of ink is applied.

Print quality

A printer expert looks closely at the pictures to

assess the quality of the colour, the detail and whether there are any imperfections. For example, we look at whether large areas of the same colour have printed consistently.

To judge the level of detail, we examine particular parts of the print-out, such as the weave on a cotton shirt.

Canon printer

Canon's new premium photo paper produced excellent photos when printed on a Canon Pixma 1800 machine.

It's a different story for Canon's regular photo paper, which produced images that were pale and washed out.

Kodak's regular paper was the worst performer. The prints were

washed out, and when we exposed the paper to water the image ran horribly.

Best quality Canon Plus Glossy (PP-201)

Best value Lexmark Everyday Glossy



BRAND	PRICE	TEST PERFORMANCE		SCORE %
	COST PER PAGE (£)	TOTAL PRINT QUALITY	TOTAL TECHNICAL	
CANON Plus Glossy (PP-201) ^a	0.47	★★★★★	★★★★★	92
FUJIFILM Premium	0.60	★★★★★	★★★★	83
LEXMARK Everyday Glossy	0.25	★★★★★	★★★★	79
CANON Glossy (GP 401)	0.32	★★★	★★★	51
KODAK Photo Paper ^b	0.40	★	★	12

^a This has replaced Canon's old Plus Glossy, which scored 83 per cent ^b Kodak has launched a new version of this paper, too late for us to test, with a weight of 180gsm. The version we tested, which should be avoided, is clearly marked 165gsm

HP printer

HP's premium paper produced good-quality images when used on the HP Deskjet 6940. Canon's regular paper comes in second but offers better value.

HP's Everyday paper may be cheaper still, but it's one to avoid. Kodak's regular paper was even worse.

The HP printer was the only one that could be fitted with a

special cartridge designed for photos. We tested this and the standard one. The special cartridge produced better photos but you'll have to buy it separately at an additional cost of £24.

Best quality HP Premium Plus

Best value Lexmark Everyday Glossy



BRAND	PRICE	TEST PERFORMANCE		SCORE %
	COST PER PAGE (£)	TOTAL PRINT QUALITY	TOTAL TECHNICAL	
HP Premium Plus	0.60	★★★★	★★★★	71
CANON Glossy (GP 401)	0.32	★★★★	★★★	65
LEXMARK Everyday Glossy	0.25	★★★★★	★★★★	59
HP Everyday	0.20	★★★	★	38
KODAK Photo Paper ^a	0.40	★★	★★	26

^a Kodak has launched a new version of this paper, too late for us to test, with a weight of 185gsm. The version we tested, which should be avoided, is clearly marked 165gsm

Epson printer

Epson's premium paper came top when tested on the Epson D92 Stylus printer. It coped excellently with all the images and was pretty smudge-resistant in our water test.

However, it did struggle to reproduce detail in the over-inking test and, at 67p a page, is one of the most costly.

Kodak's Ultra Premium is

nearly as good but is even dearer. Epson's regular paper doesn't quite live up to these high standards but is still a reasonable choice. The worst paper was HP's Everyday. The prints were dark and foggy.

Best quality Epson Premium Glossy, Kodak Ultra Premium

Best value Tesco Photo Paper



BRAND	PRICE	TEST PERFORMANCE		SCORE %
	COST PER PAGE (£)	TOTAL PRINT QUALITY	TOTAL TECHNICAL	
EPSON Premium Glossy	0.67	★★★★★	★★★★	81
KODAK Ultra Premium ^a	0.70	★★★★★	★★★★	80
EPSON Photo Paper	0.24	★★★★	★★★★	72
TESCO Photo Paper	0.12	★★★★	★★★★	72
HP Everyday	0.20	★★	★	29

^a Kodak has increased its paper weight to 285gsm. The one we tested weighed 280gsm and performed well. The new version was launched too late to test

Lexmark printer

Yet again we found that the printer manufacturer's premium paper gave the best results when tested on its own machine (the Z640). This time the Lexmark Premium Glossy paper came out on top.

However, the Lexmark Everyday Glossy paper was almost as good, and at just 25p a page, it's one of the best-value papers in our test.

HP's Premium Plus wasn't far behind, although there was a

hint of red. But keep it dry, as the ink ran all over the page when exposed to water. It costs more than the Lexmark papers.

The worst paper tested was HP's regular paper. Prints were too pink and it did poorly in the over-inking and water tests.

Best quality Lexmark Premium Glossy

Best value Lexmark Everyday Glossy



BRAND	PRICE	TEST PERFORMANCE		SCORE %
	COST PER PAGE (£)	TOTAL PRINT QUALITY	TOTAL TECHNICAL	
LEXMARK Premium Glossy	0.37	★★★★★	★★	62
LEXMARK Everyday Glossy	0.25	★★★★★	★★★★	61
HP Premium Plus	0.60	★★★★★	★★	58
HP Everyday	0.20	★★	★	31