

Troubleshooter's Guide to Perfect Prints

PROBLEM - Dark print with no contrast

You have overexposed the print; print it again this time correcting your exposure by running a test strip first. You may need to use a contrast filter if you are using polycontrast paper.

PROBLEM - Dark print, little detail in light areas

You have overexposed the print while using a contrast filter that is too dark, forcing the white areas from the print. Next time use a lower contrast filter; adjust exposure by running a test strip and reprinting.

PROBLEM - Mottled black areas but the rest of the print appears OK

You have pulled the print from the developer too soon because you probably overexposed the print in the first place and had to pull it from the developer to keep it from getting too dark. Next time adjust exposure, using a test strip, and leave the print in the developer for the correct time.

PROBLEM - Light print but with good detail

The print was just underexposed, increase exposure and reprint.

PROBLEM - Light print with no detail in highlight areas

The print was underexposed and underdeveloped. You need to adjust and correct your exposure times using a test strip and leaving the print in the developer for the correct time.

PROBLEM - Emulsion peeling

Either the wash water was too hot or you washed the print too long. Keep wash water below 80 degrees and wash for the correct length of time.

PROBLEM - Prints turn lighter in fix

The fix is too strong; use the correct strength and start over.

PROBLEM - Dark gray picture with gray margins

Could be many things: the paper has been fogged, the paper is outdated and not good, chemicals are not mixed properly, or the print was extremely overdeveloped. Start again with fresh paper; if that doesn't work, change the chemicals and be sure you develop the correct time.

PROBLEM - Gray picture with slight gray margins

Your safelight is too strong, which means that it is either too close to the enlarger or not the correct safelight for the paper you are using. Make sure you have the correct safelight recommended for the paper you are using or move it farther from the enlarger.

PROBLEM - Dark smears or stains on the print

You are using old developer that needs to be changed. Change the developer in the trays daily.

PROBLEM - Circular dark spots on print

You probably have bubbles in the fixer. Be sure and agitate the print while in the fix to avoid this problem.

PROBLEM - Circular light spots on the print

The print was not agitated enough in the developer. Develop the print face up with proper agitation.

PROBLEM - White fingerprints on print

Greasy fingers; you have been eating or putting on make-up and forgot to wash your hands. Keep hands clean at all times.

PROBLEM - Dark fingerprints on print

You did not clean your hands after making that last print because there are chemicals on your hands. Always handle the print by the edges, using the tongs, and keep those hands clean.

PROBLEM - White spots, wiggley and curved lines (flying worms)

Dust on negative, clean the negative with a camel's hair brush or with a commercial negative cleaner and lens tissue. Handle it carefully as not to scratch it because scratches are harder to fix than dust.

PROBLEM - White lines running through print

The negative has been scratched; be sure to handle negatives with care at all times. The best way to save this print is to spot (retouch) the negative or print.

PROBLEM - Thin dark lines on print

More than one print in the tray, or the tray was gritty and dirty. Develop one print at time using clean trays and fresh chemicals.

PROBLEM - Tiny dark spots on print

There are clear holes in your negative resulting from too strong a stop bath or dust on the negatives while in the camera. It is better not to use a stop bath when processing negatives and use tap water to prevent this problem.

PROBLEM - Silver-brown stains on prints

The best way to solve this problem is to use a stronger stop bath.

PROBLEM - Yellow stains appear during drying time, image fading

The wash time was too short; be sure to wash paper for the correct amount of time.

PROBLEM - Brown stains appear on print

The fixer was too weak and needs to be changed.

Troubleshooter's Guide to Perfect Negatives

PROBLEM - Film feels slimy or slick

The wash was contaminated or the wetting agent used was exhausted. Use a good wetting agent after fixing and, if necessary, add a filter to the wash water.

PROBLEM - Film is brittle after drying

Film was dried at too high a temperature. Keep the drying time as close to the developing time as possible.

PROBLEM - Dark areas close to sprocket holes on 35mm film

Overagitation or improper agitation, or possibly light fog (light getting to the film while in the camera). If this happens, watch agitation procedures closely and check camera for light leaks. If it continues to happen, take camera for repairs.

PROBLEM - The emulsion is coming off film

There was an erratic change in temperature sometime during processing or the film was washed too long. Be sure and check temperatures during all phases of developments trying to keep all chemistry within five degrees of each other. Do not over wash the film; use correct washing time.

PROBLEM - Clear dots that are denser at edges in negative

Bubbles are clinging to the film during development. Remember to rap the developing tank against the sink after pouring the developer into the tank.

PROBLEM - Half-moon marks appear on negative

The film was bent while being loaded onto the reel. Do not force film and always handle film gently.

PROBLEM - Uneven lines appear on negative

Either a lack of developer or severe underagitation. Use the correct amount of developer and pay very close attention to agitation.

PROBLEM - Water spots on negative

Not using a wetting agent or not properly storing negatives. Do not leave negatives hanging in the drying closet for several days. When they are dry, file them either in negative sleeves or envelopes.

PROBLEM - Clear holes in negative

These clear holes are the result of too strong stop bath or dust on the negative while in the camera. Do not use a stop bath when processing 35mm negatives and use tap water to avoid this problem.

PROBLEM - Stains appear several days

This is probably a combination of bad fixer and poor washing or either of the two. Always use fresh chemistry in proper dilution and wash correctly.

PROBLEM - White deposit on film

All fixer on the film has not washed off properly. To solve this problem just go back and wash the film properly.

PROBLEM - Some of the negative is sharp, rest out of focus

You have a problem with the pressure plate in your camera; it is time to see the repairman.

PROBLEM - Entire negative is blurry

The lens is either out of alignment, or you need to have your eyes checked. Take the camera to the repairman or you might need to see your optometrist.

PROBLEM - Negative has reversed look

The film has been fogged lightly. Either the darkroom is not light-tight or the tank has a light leak.

PROBLEM - Too much contrast in negative

An underexposed negative has been overdeveloped. Use closer meter readings and more accurate development times according to the time and temperature. These negatives can be printed on softer paper (#1) or use a smaller contrast filter (#1).

PROBLEM - Negative does not have enough contrast

Underexposed film has been underdeveloped. Be sure to expose and develop correctly. The negative can be printed by using harder fiber based paper (#'s 4, 5, 6), or a bigger contrast filter with polycontrast paper (#'s 3 through 4).

PROBLEM - Scratches on negative

Rolls on reel incorrectly or wiped with squeegee or rough hands. Rinse film in photo-flo solution and hang to dry.

PROBLEM - Clear spots on negative

Caused by static electricity usually in cool weather, when film is rewound too fast into canister.