

Setting up your workspace

- Choose a work surface appropriate to the surface you want to print on – hard for paper and card, and slightly soft for fabrics – this could be a board covered with an old blanket or a couple of pieces of felt. Whatever you choose make sure the surface is smooth and wrinkle free. For fabrics, cover the surface with another piece of cloth to absorb any excess ink – plastic can allow the ink to spread underneath your fabric and spoil your print.
- Be near a sink, or a large box filled with water as print media should not be left in the screen to dry.

Gathering tools and materials to get started

The basics:

- Thermal screen(s)
- Lightweight squeegee(s) the correct size for your screen
- Print media suitable for the surface you are printing on
- Surface to print on
- Pins or tape to secure the cloth/paper to the print surface
- Plastic container e.g. cat litter tray to keep your workspace tidy and to protect your work from unwanted drips and marks - place containers of media, squeegees, etc in the tray

Printing technique

Use the thermal screen with the shiny plastic-coated side of the mesh face down (you should be able to see the words THIS SIDE UP on the frame)

- Spoon an even 'bead' of print media – wider than the widest part of the screen's design – on to the top end of the screen – NOT on the frame
- Hold the edge of the screen to stabilize, and with other hand hold the squeegee behind the print media
- Draw the squeegee towards you smoothly but firmly, keeping the squeegee almost upright
- At the bottom of the screen, scoop up any unused media with the squeegee and deposit it back at the top of the screen ready for the next print
- Sometimes one pull of the squeegee is sufficient, and at other times, two will be necessary
- Lift up the screen carefully and reposition it for the next print
- **Don't allow any print media to dry in the screen.** Some types of media will permanently block the screen, whilst cleaning others out of the mesh completely may damage the screen
- If you require lots of prints close together, or to change colours, it is often better to wash and dry your screen whilst you wait for one layer of printing to dry

Thermal screen maintenance

With care you will get many hundreds of prints from a thermal screen but they do not last forever. The design, the media you use, how they are used (e.g. for a few prolonged sessions or

frequent short sessions) and how carefully they are washed and dried will all affect their longevity.

Cleaning your thermal screen

Wash the thermal screen in cool running water with a soft sponge – avoid power spray-washers and **never use brushes or abrasive scourers** as they will damage the mesh. Screen inks and dyes may cause staining of the mesh but as long as the water is running clear the screen should be clean

- Squeeze the edges of the tape to make sure none of the media has crept underneath
- Pat the thermal screen gently with an old towel to remove excess water and then leave to dry thoroughly standing upright before putting away

Storing your thermal screens

- The screens are best stored upright and out of direct sunlight. Extreme heat (e.g. leaving in a car on a hot day) can cause the frames to warp
- Wait until screens are thoroughly dry before putting away. Storing damp screens can cause the plastic coating to peel off

Ideas for getting the most out of your screen

Try some of the following ideas to get started:

- Print single images as focal points
- Print repeat images to form patterns
- Rotate the screen to print the image randomly all over the cloth. Print and overprint in layers, with one or more colours
- Combine two or more screens in the same piece – this could be small and large versions of the same image for variety of scale, a 'texture' screen as a background with a feature image overprinted, or two or more screens with related imagery like spiders and web

How to avoid 'ghosting'

If images are printed close together or overlapping, you may find that you have picked up medium from an earlier (still wet) print on the back of the screen. This will cause a 'ghost' image to be laid down on the subsequent print.

To avoid this you can lightly cover the wet print with kitchen paper (without pressing it into the print) to prevent picking media up on the back of the screen. Trim the paper if trying to fit into a tight space.

Masking off areas of the screen

Sticky tape or other media will damage the mesh so if you want to print only a small part of the image, masking off parts of the screen has to be done with kitchen paper or photocopy paper taped **ONLY** to the underside of the frame itself. You may need to replace this as it gets wet with media. Alternatively you could try using a small 'spot' squeegee.

screens4printing.com – visit the website to:

- Buy thermal screens from our extensive design library
- Order custom screens made from your own designs
- Buy water-based textile screen inks and lightweight squeegees