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All About Scrapbooking: How To Create Your Own

Gather Up Your Memories

Creating a scrapbook is a great way to record your family's most precious memories -- including summers, vacations, special birthdays and graduations. Photos are the heart of most scrapbooks. Below are some tips on how to gather these and handle them safely, as well as ideas on other kinds of keepsakes you might want to include in your scrapbook.

Using Photos

Gather as many photographs as possible. Sort them so they relate to one another and to the album's theme. You can affix the original photos in your album. However, if you want to save them for other purposes, make copies of the originals on a color photocopier.

Remember your collection of slides and reel-to-reel 8mm films. These can be converted to photographs at a relatively low cost. Check your local photography supply shops and photo studios.

Handling Older Photos

Be sure to wash your hands before handling your old photos. The dirt and oils from your skin could damage them. The same is true for handling photo negatives.

A family photo that has yellowed, become brittle, or been affixed with tape should be moved to a safer environment. However, you may want to copy the photo before moving it or have it professionally photographed while it's still in its current site.

Use your heirloom photos in your album or make color photocopies of them. If you decide to use the original photos, consider securing them to the scrapbook pages with photo corners, instead of permanently adhering them.

Including Mementos

Collect everything! Save small items that relate to your theme -- old letters, awards, certificates, ribbons, calling cards, a lock of hair, menus, place mats, brochures, business cards, newspaper and magazine articles, programs, announcements, matchbooks, and food wrappers. These items add interest to the pages -- and to your family's history. Even objects from nature make interesting mementos. Use a pH tester pen to determine the acidity or alkalinity of such items.

Protect scrapbook pages by photocopying or by placing the item in a clear, self-adhesive, acid-free memorabilia pocket. They're available in several sizes with scrapbooking supplies.

Heirlooms, such as a brooch, pocket watch, or even a large quilt, are family keepsakes worth preserving. To enjoy these items, photograph or copy them and include them in your heirloom scrapbook.

Scrapbook Supplies

Since the purpose of compiling a scrapbook is to preserve memories, start with supplies that protect your precious photographs and memorabilia. Choose archival supplies; acid-free and lignin-free paper; acid-free or pH-neutral adhesives; and permanent, fade-resistant inks and pen. If these words are new to you, check the "Glossary of Scrapbooking Terms" section on this site.

The basics of scrapbooking include an album, adhesive, a pair of scissors, and a journaling pen. With your own photos, you can create pages using just these four items.

Choose a photo album that contains acid-free pages, or purchase acid-free sheet protectors and slip them into a three-ring binder. Be sure the sheet protectors are PVC-free (polyvinyl chloride-free), or chemically stable; look on the packaging for a "photo-safe" or "archival" notation.

Adhesives to secure everything to the album pages come in many forms, including photo tape, photo corners, double-sided adhesive dots, squares or strips, glue pens, glue sticks, non-permanent glue, and bottled glues. Like all of the materials used for your album, the adhesives must be acid-free.

Optional supplies to enhance your scrapbook, mat your photos, and create interesting backgrounds include colored and patterned acid-free papers. Acid-free permanent markers and pens assist you with decorative writing and are fun for adding doodles to your scrapbook pages. Use straight-edge or decorative-edge scissors to cut your photos into interesting shapes and crop out any unwanted areas.

Other supplies you may want to consider are stickers, a paper trimmer, templates, decorative rulers, paper punches, rolling ball glue pen, rubber stamps, computer clipart, circle cutter, idea books, and of course, magazines like Scrapbooks Etc.

Since all of the elements in your album should be acid-free, it only makes sense that you store your supplies in high quality boxes and envelopes. You'll find these and all the above supplies at most stores that carry scrapbook, photography, craft or stationery supplies.

With the recent surge in popularity of scrapbooking, There are also many good websites devoted to selling scrapbooking supplies such as:

- JK Crafts (<http://www.jkcrafts.com/cgi-bin/store>),
- Sizzix (<http://www.sizzix.com>) and
- Creative Express (<http://www.creativexpress.com>).

Scrapbooking Materials

Albums

Photo-friendly, acid-free albums are available in standard 8-1/2 x 11-inch, 12 x 12-inch, and 5 x 7-inch sizes. Most will let you insert plastic page protectors. The most popular types of scrapbooking albums are:

Three-ring: These familiar favorites have rings that snap apart for easy page insertion and removal.

Spiral-Bound: Albums with this type of wire binding have permanently attached pages and are ideal for one-topic and themed scrapbooks.

Strap-style: Albums that use plastic straps allow the pages to lie completely flat when the album is opened.

Adhesives

There are lots of different scrapbooking adhesives available, but some will work better than others for particular applications. You can choose from adhesives that set up instantly as well as repositionable adhesives that let you safely lift and rearrange elements (wet bonds usually are permanent while dry bonds usually are repositionable). Here are the most popular types of adhesives and the applications where each works best:

Double-sided tape and dots: Usually sold in plastic dispensers, and is available in both permanent and repositionable adhesives. Adhesive dots are great for adhering smaller items to layouts and also are available in permanent and repositionable forms.

Photo corners and sleeves: Photo corners with a peel-away backing come in sheets and rolls and in a variety of colors. Photo sleeves are made of clear plastic and have adhesive backing; they simply slip over your photos. Corners are ideal for attaching photos directly to layouts; sleeves work best for displaying photos that you may want to change later.

Spray Adhesives: Aerosol spray adhesives provide an even layer of glue that can cover large surfaces quickly. Sprays work well for adhering background papers or photo mats, and the dried adhesive won't show through transparent papers, such as vellum. Use spray adhesives only in well-ventilated areas and away from flames; never let children use them without adult supervision.

Liquid Adhesives: These come in a bottle, stick, pen, and wand applicators, and with thick or thin tips. The adhesive itself may be permanent or repositionable and fast- or slow-drying. Liquid adhesives work best for attaching small items such as punches or die-cut letters, or for tacking down dimensional items such as beads and buttons.

Adhesive Tabs: White and transparent double-sided adhesive tabs come in roll form and in refillable dispensers. They're great for adhering both small and large items with minimal mess.

Adhesive Foam: Use double-sided adhesive foam, dots, squares, and roll tape to secure items to your page and add dimension at the same time. They'll lift die cuts, letters, and cropped photos up to a 1/2-inch from the page surface.

Embellishments

Use embellishments to personalize and enhance your scrapbook pages by highlighting photos, drawing attention to journaling, or helping to set a theme. Although nearly anything can work as an embellishment, these three are amongst the most popular:

Punches: Available in a variety of shapes and sizes, decorative paper punches let you create custom accents by punching shapes from whatever papers complement your layout.

Die Cuts: These premade paper shapes are available at most scrapbook and crafts stores and come in many shapes, sizes and colors. For a fee, some stores will let you use their die-cutting machine with your own papers to create shapes and perfectly coordinate with your layout.

Stickers: Acid-free, photo-safe stickers come in thousands of different themes and sizes and are widely available in sheets and rolls.

Pens and Pencils

Lots of different writing utensils are safe to use on scrapbook pages, but look especially for those labeled "acid-free" or "photo-safe." Also choose products that will resist bleeding and fading. All come in a plethora of colors and sizes.

Gel Pens: These medium-line pens are ideal for journaling or outlining letters and embellishments, and they just come in just about every color imaginable.

Colored Pencils: Available in hundreds of hues, colored pencils are a scrapbooker's staple, ideal for shading and adding highlights to lettering and creating embellishments. Use them with a blender -- a clear, colorless pencil or pen -- to smooth and soften your colors.

Felt-tip Markers: Besides giving you a range of color choices, felt-tip markers also come in several different tip styles. Here are the four most common tips you'll find:

Chisel Point: This versatile marker has a tip with both broad and narrow edges and can produce distinctive decorative lettering and designs.

Monoline: These all-purpose pens have tips that range from very fine to thick (usually specified in millimeters). The round, tapered nibs can be used to create smooth lines for basic lettering techniques, captions, borders, line art, and illustrations, as well as to add details to letters made with other types of markers.

Scroll Point: This notched-tip marker produces a double line with just a single stroke. Use it to make basic block letters, design detailed borders, or draw straight double lines.

Brush Point: This marker has a flexible paintbrush-style tip, which is useful for adding ink to rubber stamps and for filling in shapes and letters.

Templates

Take advantage of many shapes and sizes of plastic templates to crop your photos, create embellishments and do dry embossing. Lettering templates also come in a range of sizes and type styles.

Scissors and Other Cutting Tools

Most cutting implements you'll find for sale will work fine for scrapbooking. Here are a few of the handiest and how best to use them.

Scissors: They come in straight- and decorative-edge styles. Long straight-edge scissors are useful for cutting large sheets of card stock and paper for freehand cropping photos. Small scissors work best for cutting out detailed embellishments. Decorative-edge scissors are ideal for cutting photo mats or anything to which you'd like to give a dressier look.

Crafts and Swivel Knives: Craft knives are perfect for making straight cuts on paper and card stock and for cropping photos. Swivel knives are similar to craft knives, but their rotating blade makes them better for cutting along curves or cutting out letters and template shapes. Use these sharp tools with a self-healing or glass cutting mat.

Rotary Cutters: Often used to cut fabric, rotary cutters are also handy for cutting large sheets of paper and card stock or trimming photos. Use these tools with self-healing or glass cutting mats.

Paper Trimmers: This tool is handy for making square cuts and straight edges. The larger sizes are capable of handling even oversize sheets of paper and card stock.

How to Place Your Pictures

Deciding how to display your collected photos can be the hardest part of creating a scrapbook page. Here are some ideas to get you started.

Use Copies, Not Photos!

Photocopies of photographs allow you to play with the sizes and shapes of the images: enlarge some areas and cut them into silhouettes; shrink others to fit inside stamped frames; or trim away uninteresting portions of backgrounds to make unusual shapes. Plus, photocopies allow some creative room to work with color Polaroid photos. Black-and white Polaroid photos can be cropped, but color Polaroids will separate into thin layers.

When making photocopies of your photos -- color, sepia-tone, or black-and-white -- do it on a color copier. The detailing in the black-and-white photo is all but lost when copied on a

black and white photocopier. The middle tones go very light or very dark, and you lose all the fine detailing. See how much more closely the color copy, right center, resembles the original, while the black-and-white copy appears muddy.

Cropping: Think twice, cut once!

With a few well-placed snips of your scissors, you can make your photos dance, jump, and sail off the page. Creative cropping can strengthen a picture's impact by eliminating unwanted backgrounds and spotlighting the primary subject.

Before you crop your photo, play with the page layout. Start by making several copies of your snapshots on a black-and-white photocopier. Cut the photocopies in a variety of shapes, then experiment with different ways to position and use them on the page.

When cropping a photo, be careful not to cut away important bits of history. An old family car, portions of clothing, or a piece of furniture in the background could prove sentimentally invaluable in the years to come.

Tips for Taking Great Photos

Great photographs make great scrapbooks. Carry your camera everywhere and keep these simple guidelines in mind whenever you want to capture a memory:

- 1. Be generous with your film.** Opportunities will present themselves just once, and the price of film is very minor when compared to the cost of a once-in-a-lifetime shot or experience.
- 2. Capture the unposed or unscripted moment.** The best shots are un-rehearsed and capture the personality of the subjects.
- 3. Write It Down.** Keep a small notebook with you so you can write down names, places, dates, and any other pertinent information about the people and the places you photograph.
- 4. Get up Close and Personal.** Try to position the camera no more than 8 feet from the subject.
- 5. Set the Scene.** Take one shot of the people, and then take a second shot of the background in order to set the mood.
- 6. Use Light to Your Advantage.** Have your subject face the sun, or keep the sun behind your own shoulder. Early morning and late afternoon on a sunny day are ideal times for taking pictures; bright noonday sun creates harsh shadows and makes people squint their eyes. Gray days produce grainy photos.
- 7. Create an eye-catching composition.** Rather than place your subject directly in the center of the photo, adjust your frame so the subject is about one-third of the way from the edge. The same rule applies when shooting a still life or landscape.

Creating Design Impact with Your Scrapbook

You can enhance the design impact of your scrapbook by incorporating any one or any combination of the following techniques.

Templates

Use plastic templates and cookie cutters for patterns to crop photos into interesting shapes such as clouds, bubbles, raindrops, footballs, and apples. Plastic templates come in a variety of shapes and sizes: hearts, stars, ovals, and rounds. Or you can cut your own template designs from cardboard or plastic coffee-can lids. Layer the cut photos with colorful background papers cut in the same shape but slightly larger.

Silhouettes

To give a subject impact or use it in an imaginative scenario, cut away the entire background. Put children into a newspaper cartoon. Or make them look as though they are sitting on top of a skyscraper, riding a dinosaur, or lifting a building.

Snippets

Save picture trimmings and cut them into shapes such as flowers, borders, letters, and numbers. Or use your scraps to make a background collage.

Special Cutting Techniques

In a cutting conundrum? Experiment with some fun, fancy, and easy cutting techniques for embellishing your scrapbook pages.

Paper Braiding and Layering

This crafted look adds an old-world touch to any page.

Tips for Creating a Great Scrapbook Album

1. Identify as many people in your photos as possible, and add specific places and dates whenever possible. Ask other and older family members for help in identification. Family get together are very useful for soliciting this type of help.
2. Be sure to wash your hands before handling old photos. The dirt and oils from your skin could damage them. The same is true for handling photo negatives.
3. Since all of the elements in your album should be acid-free, it only makes sense that you store your supplies in archival quality boxes and envelopes. You'll find these at most stores that carry scrapbook, photography, or stationery supplies.

4. Create an interesting composition by placing photos of different shapes and sizes together on the scrapbook page. Back some photos with colored papers cut out with decorative-edge scissors. Leave others unframed.
5. Use your heirloom photos in your album or make color photocopies of them. If you decide to use the original photos, consider securing them to the scrapbook pages with photo corners, instead of permanently adhering them.
6. To capture all the shading, make color photocopies of your black-and-white or sepia-toned photos, rather than making black-and-white photocopies.
7. Your heritage album will be an easier "read" if you title the pages (or sections). It's easily done with a family member's name written in a calligraphy pen and framed like the photos.
8. Include small mementos on your pages -- newspaper clippings, old letters, awards, certificates, ribbons, calling cards, or a lock of hair. These items add interest to the pages -- and to your family's history.
9. When recording the information in your family album, use your own handwriting. The warmth of penned notes and labels will give your album a personal touch that can't be generated with computer lettering.

Turn Your Scrapbook into a Journal

Your scrapbook page won't be complete until you tell the story behind the photos.

Add names, dates, words, or phrases, perhaps written on a stamped scroll or banner, to identify people and places and to help tell your story. Use acid-free pens and markers, available in a variety of colors, to handwrite the information. Or purchase rubber stamp alphabets in a style to suit your theme.

Recollections may seem trivial at the time -- the weather, what you ate, a travel situation, something funny that happened -- but these details will prove fascinating to those who read your scrapbook pages years from now.

Make journaling a family affair. Ask your husband and your children about their favorite remembrances of holidays, vacations, birthdays, and family traditions, then record them. Identify as many people in your photos as possible, and add specific places and dates whenever possible. Ask older family members for help.

Your heritage album will be an easier "read" if you title the pages (or sections). It's easily done with a family member's name written in a calligraphy pen and framed like the photos.

When recording the information in your family album, use your own handwriting. The warmth of penned notes and labels will give your album a personal touch that can't be generated with computer type.

Digital Scrapbooking

Sophisticated scrapbookers no longer need to cut and paste clippings or photos into books because scanners, desktop publishing, page layout programs, HTML, and web pages make it relatively easy to self-publish, even if it is just for a readership of one.

Scrapbooks that exist completely in digital image form are referred to as "digital scrapbooks," or "computer scrapbooks." While some people prefer the physicality of the actual artifacts they paste into their scrapbooks, the digital scrapbooking hobby has grown in popularity in recent years.

Some popular digital scrapbooking websites:

1. Scrapbook-Bytes (<http://www.scrapbook-bytes.com>)
2. Scrapper's Guide (<http://www.scrapppersguide.com/index.htm> l)
3. Scrapbook Graphics (<http://www.scrapbookgraphics.com/>)

Scrapbooking Glossary

Here's some commonly used scrapbooking terminology.

Terms

Acid-free

Acid is used in paper manufacturing to break apart the wood fibers and the lignin that holds them together. If acid remains in the materials used for photo albums, the acid can react chemically with photographs and cause their deterioration. Acid-free products have a pH factor of 7.0 or above. It's imperative that all materials (glue, pens, paper, etc.) used in memory albums or scrapbooks be acid-free.

Acid migration

Acid migration is the transfer of acidity from one item to another through physical contact or acidic vapors. If a newspaper clipping is put into an album, the area it touches will eventually turn yellow or brown. A deacidification pH factor spray can be used on acidic papers, or they can be color photocopied onto acid-free papers.

Archival quality

"Archival quality" is a term used to indicate materials which have undergone laboratory analysis to determine that their acidic and buffered content is within safe levels.

Buffered paper

During manufacture, a buffering agent such as calcium carbonate or magnesium bicarbonate can be added to paper to neutralize acid contaminant. Such papers have a pH of 8.5.

Journaling

Journaling refers to text on a scrapbook page giving details about the photographs. It can be done in your own handwriting or with adhesive letters, rub-ons, and stencils. It is probably the most important part of memory albums.

Lignin

Lignin is the material that holds wood fibers together as a tree grows. If lignin remains in the final paper (as with newsprint), it will become yellow and brittle over time. Most paper other than newsprint is lignin-free.

pH factor

The pH factor refers to acidity of a paper. The pH scale is the standard for measurement of acidity and alkalinity. It runs from 0 to 14, each number representing a tenfold increase; neutral is 7. Acid-free products have a pH factor of 7 or above. Special pH tester pens are available to help you determine the acidity or alkalinity of products.

Photo-safe

Photo-safe is a term similar to archival quality but more specific to materials used with photographs. Acid-free is the determining factor for a product to be labeled photo-safe.

Sheet protectors

These are made of plastic to slip over a finished album page. They can be side-loading or top-loading and fit 8-1/2 x 11-inch or 12 x 12-inch pages. It is important that they are acid-free. Polypropylene (vinyl), commonly available for office use, is not of archival quality and should not be included in albums.

Techniques

Journaling

Handwritten or printed journaling -- the art of telling a story in print -- separates scrapbooks from photo albums. As you plan journaling for a scrapbook page, keep these tips in mind:

- Try to let your journaling connect the page viewer with the actual event. Record more than just titles, dates, and names. Describe your reactions to what was happening, tell what the subject was doing, and why, share how you feel when you look at the photos, or point out what you notice now that you didn't when the photo was taken.
- Let someone else proofread a draft of your journaling before you add it to the page. Check for spelling and grammatical errors, or use the tools in your word processing program.

- Practice hand-journaling to perfect your penmanship. Try writing your text in pencil before going over it in pen. Also experiment with different styles of script and a variety of writing instruments.
- Use computer type to record large amounts of journaling or create custom page titles.
- Try recording your journaling in shapes such as circles or hearts, or in a wavy or diagonal line for variety and interest.

Cropping

Cropping involves a variety of techniques and tools. Make multiple prints or photocopies before cropping your photos, and crop only small areas at a time. Don't crop Polaroids -- the chemicals in the paper will damage your photos.

There's not one right way to crop. You can use a craft knife and ruler to trim off a portion of the photo and retain its square or rectangular shape. Or use a pair of small sharp scissors to silhouette and image, cutting away the background. You can also use circle cutters and templates to create interesting photo shapes or simply crop the photo freehand. Here are some tips:

- Carefully compose your photos in the camera viewfinder before shooting to avoid excessive cropping later.
- Let the natural composition of your photo determine the final cropping. For example, a wide group of people will appear better cropped as a horizontal oval than as a circle.
- Let the photo remain the focus. Don't let elaborate cropping detract from the subject.

Matting

Use matting to make your photos, journaling, and memorabilia stand out on the page. Coordinate matting colors and textures with your photographs and memorabilia rather than detract from the subjects. Use a solid-color mat to blend in with the layout or a patterned mat to stand out.

To create a simple photo mat, use a background paper or card stock that's slightly larger than your photo. Position the photo on the mat, and adhere it with archival-quality adhesive. Then trim the mat with straight- or decorative-edge scissors, a craft knife, or a paper trimmer.

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