Printer tips from Wen

When it comes to choosing a printer for this course, the good news is – almost any inkjet printer will do the job. You don't need the fanciest setup to get started. Wen's advice is practical, down-to-earth, and all about making it work with what you've got.

The basics

If you're just starting out, an all-in-one or small-in-one printer is a great choice. These are widely available, usually include a scanner, and are simple to use. Plus, they're often lightweight and budget-friendly.

- Look for printers with an **L-feed (or rear-feed option)** – this lets you print on thicker materials like digitally prepared fabrics and substrates.
- Try to avoid U-feed printers, which aren't ideal for stiffer surfaces. In a U-feed printer, the paper usually makes a 180-degree turn, while an L-feed printer requires less than a 90-degree turn.
- This is important because some substrates created with acrylic medium can be quite stiff, which might cause problems in a U-feed printer. You are looking to **minimise the amount of bends** the substrate must make in the machine.

Wen's printer:

Wen uses an Epson WorkForce XP-410 for everyday printing and trying out new techniques. It prints letter size paper and is perfect for experimenting. This is a great printer for smaller prints and play-friendly projects. Unfortunately, the Epson XP-410 printer is now discontinued, but here are some other similar models with a scanner and rear feed options:

- Epson Expression Premium XP-7100
- Epson Expression XP-8800
- Epson Expression Photo XP-970 (wide-format up to 11 x 17")
- Canon Pixma MegaTank G3270
- Canon Maxify MegaTank GX3020
- Canon Pixma Pro-200S

Printer models change all the time, so it's worth doing some research to see what's available.

Want something portable?

You might like a compact printer if space is tight or you want to print on the go. They can be pricey new, but you can sometimes find refurbished ones on eBay. Please note: these options do not offer a scanner:

- Canon Pixma iP110
- Canon Pixma TR150
- Epson WorkForce WF-100 Wireless Mobile Printer

Looking for professional results?

Photo Stylus printers or photo wide format printers are a step up from the all-in-one printers. These offer more ink detail (dpi), print width, and additional settings – but they do cost more and take a bit of learning.

- Wen has an Epson Photo Stylus 2400 (13” wide). Note this printer model is discontinued.
- Epson SureColor P700 (up to 13" width) or P900 (up to 17” width) may be a good replacement option for the discontinued 2400.
- Larger printers are great if you’re printing big – just keep in mind they need regular use or the ink will dry out (note: you can wrap the printer in plastic and turn on occasionally to 'wet' the nozzles).

Printer inks:

Understanding your printer's ink is super helpful when working with alternative surfaces like digitally prepared fabrics or papers. There are two main types of ink used in inkjet printers – **pigment-based and dye-based**. Both can be used in this course, but they do behave a little differently. See more detailed information on the next page.

What to avoid:

- Laser printers use heat and toner – these won’t work with mixed-media substrates.
- Fabric dye printers (like those for textile printing) need steam to set the dye – not ideal for this process.

Final thoughts from Wen:

You don’t need the most expensive printer – just one that works with your space, budget, and goals. Wen encourages you to read your printer manual, get familiar with the settings, and most importantly – have fun with it.

Pigment-based ink vs Dye-based ink

Understanding your printer's ink is super helpful when working with alternative surfaces like digitally prepared fabrics or papers. There are two main types of ink used in inkjet printers – **pigment-based and dye-based**. Both can be used in this course, but they do behave a little differently. Here's what you need to know:

Pigment-based inks

These are the gold standard when it comes to durability and longevity – especially if you're planning to frame your artwork or display it over time.

- **Fade-resistant** – colours stay vibrant even in sunlight or bright indoor light
- **Water-resistant** – better protection if your work ever gets damp
- **Lightfast** – ideal for work that will be on display
- **Archival quality** – when combined with digitally prepared substrates (like inkAID), your prints can last 100–250 years!

Some of the top pigment ink options include:

- Epson **UltraChrome or UltraBright** pigment inks (up to 250 years durability)
- **Claria** inks (a more affordable option, with a 100-year rating) – these inks are a hybrid formulation that combines both dye-based inks for color photos and pigment-based ink for black text documents to provide vivid photo quality and sharp text. This means that while the black ink is pigment for durability on plain paper, the color inks use dyes for better color reproduction on glossy photo paper.

Pigment inks are often found in photo printers or higher-end models. If you're thinking long-term or creating gallery-ready work, they're a fantastic investment.

Dye-based inks

These are the inks found in most entry-level or all-in-one printers. They're great for learning and experimenting – especially if you already have a printer and don't want to upgrade:

- **Brighter** straight out of the printer, but more prone to fading over time
- **More sensitive to water** once dry
- **Not ideal** for long-term display or outdoor use
- Often used in **budget-friendly models** from Canon, Epson, and HP

You might also come across a mix – some printers use pigment black ink for text and dye inks for colour.

And here's the best part:

inkAID inkjet receptive coatings work with both dye and pigment inks – so you can absolutely use what you already have to get started.