

Aspect Ratio

Aspect ratio is just the proportion of width to height of an image. For example, 35 mm film frames are about 1 inch by 1.5 inches (or 24 mm by 36 mm), for an aspect ratio of 3:2 or 1.5. In other words, the long dimension is one and a half times the short dimension. Many digital cameras have an aspect ratio of 4:3, or 1.33.

Traditional sizes of photographic enlargements include 5 by 7, 8 by 10, and 11 by 14 inches, and many precut mats and frames are available in these sizes. These have aspect ratios of 1.4, 1.25, and 1.27 respectively. Since these aspect ratios are all different from both film and digital images, any image reproduced in these sizes will have to be cropped at least a little to fit. So if that's the intended use of your photo, you might want to zoom out just a bit to give yourself some margin for cropping.

Actually, there is one other alternative to cropping to fit an aspect ratio. You could stretch or shrink your image in one dimension. In Photoshop or Elements, do "Image Size" with the "Constrain Aspect Ratio" check-box turned off. But use this with caution. Stretching pictures of people tends to make them look like space aliens, and a picture of a bicycle, for example, may look odd if the wheels are oval. But many landscapes can be stretched a bit and still look fine.

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