BILL'S HOME TECH
Home & Small Business Tech Solutions

BILL'S COMPLETE MANUALS

Instant Cameras & Pocket Photo Printers

Instax, Polaroid, Kodak and HP Sprocket — explained in plain English, one step at a time

A plain-English guide to photos you can hold in your hand

Take your time — pressing buttons and pairing can't break anything

Written for you by Bill — Bill's Home Tech

(330) 200-8042 · BillsHomeTech.com

For Instax, Polaroid, Kodak & HP Sprocket · iPhone & Android apps · facts current November 2026

What's Inside

This is your guide to instant cameras and pocket photo printers: Fujifilm Instax, Polaroid, Kodak and HP Sprocket. It covers choosing one, what each print really costs, loading film and paper, taking bright, clear photos, printing from your phone, keeping your prints safe, fixing problems and avoiding scams. Read it in any order and at your own pace; there's no test, and you can't fall behind. Models differ a little, so if a word on yours is slightly different, look for the closest match. The idea is still the same.

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PART 1

Getting to Know Instant Photos

What an instant camera and a pocket photo printer actually do, the handful of words worth knowing, the four big names on the shelf, and how to tell in a minute which one you have.

CHAPTER 1

A Note from Bill

Hello, and welcome. There's something wonderful about a photo you can hold in your hand a minute after you take it. Instant cameras, the kind that push a little print out of the front, are back in a big way, and so are their cousins: small pocket printers that turn the photos on your phone into real prints while you watch. They show up on holiday gift lists every year, and they're often handed to grandparents with a cheerful "you'll love it" and not much else.

I'm Bill. For more than 30 years I've helped people get comfortable with their technology. I wrote this book for anyone who has an Instax, a Polaroid, a Kodak or an HP Sprocket, or who is thinking about buying one, for themselves or as a gift. I'll explain it the way I would at your kitchen table: slowly, in plain English, one step at a time.

What this book covers

- **What these gadgets are**: instant cameras, phone printers and the "hybrid" cameras that do both.
- **The big names**: Fujifilm Instax (mini, Square and Wide), Polaroid (Now, Go and Hi-Print), Kodak (Mini Shot, Smile and Step) and HP Sprocket.
- **Choosing one**, including honest numbers on what each print really costs, and gift advice.
- **Setting up**: batteries, charging, and loading film, paper and cartridges the right way.
- **Taking good instant photos**: light, distance and the temperature trick most people never hear about.
- **Printing from your phone** over Bluetooth with each brand's app.
- **Keeping your prints** safe for years, and saving copies on your phone.
- **Fixing problems**: blank or dark prints, jams, and apps that won't connect.
- **Scams**: fake bargain websites and counterfeit film.

WHAT THIS DOES FOR YOU

What this book does for you

By the end you'll know which film or paper your camera takes, how to load it without wasting a sheet, how to get bright, clear prints instead of dark or washed-out ones, how to print the grandchildren's photos from your phone, and how to buy film without getting cheated.

The honest "can't break it" promise

Pressing buttons, opening the app, pairing and unpairing your phone, changing settings: none of that can hurt your camera or printer. There are really only two moments that deserve a pause, and I'll flag them: **opening the film door** of an instant camera before the pack is used up (light spoils the unused sheets), and **pulling on a stuck print** (it can damage the rollers). I'll show you what to do instead.

> **GOOD TO KNOW**
>
> **Facts current as of November 2026**
>
> Models, prices and app steps in this book were checked against Fujifilm, Polaroid, Kodak and HP's own pages in November 2026. Prices change with sales and seasons, so I say "about" and ask you to check the current price before you buy. If a screen looks a little different on yours, the idea is still the same.

And you're never stuck alone. If you'd like a hand, call me at **(330) 200-8042** and we'll sort it out together. There's no such thing as a silly question about a camera.

— Bill

CHAPTER 2

What Instant Cameras and Pocket Printers Are

There are three kinds of gadget in this book. They look similar on a store shelf, but they work in different ways, and knowing which kind you have answers most questions.

Kind	What it does
Instant camera (film)	A camera loaded with a pack of instant film. You press the button, a print slides out, and the picture appears on it over the next minutes. There's no screen and no copy on a phone. Examples: Instax mini 12 and mini 13, Instax Wide 400, Polaroid Now, Polaroid Go.
Pocket photo printer	A small, battery-powered printer about the size of a phone. It has no camera. You pick a photo on your phone in the printer's app, and it prints over Bluetooth in under a minute. Examples: Instax mini Link 3, HP Sprocket, Kodak Step, Polaroid Hi-Print 2x3.
Hybrid camera	A digital camera with a screen that also prints. You take the picture, look at it, and print only the ones you like. Most can also print photos from your phone. Examples: Instax mini Evo, Kodak Mini Shot 3 Retro, Kodak Smile.

A few words worth knowing

Word	What it means
Instant film	Real photographic film with the developing chemicals built into each sheet. Instax and Polaroid use it. Each film type fits only its own cameras.
Film pack	The box-shaped cartridge you load into the camera. An Instax pack holds 10 sheets; a Polaroid i-Type or 600 pack holds 8.
ZINK paper	"Zero Ink" paper. The colors are built into the paper and appear when the printer warms it. No ink, no cartridge. HP Sprocket and the Kodak Step and Smile use it. Most ZINK paper has a peel-off sticky back.
Cartridge (dye-sub)	Some printers use an all-in-one cartridge holding paper plus a color ribbon. The print passes through several times, once per color (Kodak calls this 4PASS). Kodak Mini Shot and Polaroid Hi-Print work this way.
Developing	The minutes after a film print comes out, while the picture slowly appears. It's still sensitive to light, cold and handling during this time.
Exposure	How much light reaches the film. Too little and the print is dark; too much and it's pale or washed out.
Close-up mode	A setting for subjects about one to two feet away, like a face or a bunch of flowers.
App	The free phone program that goes with a printer or hybrid camera. Each brand has its own.

TIP

The one-sentence difference

A film camera makes **one print and nothing else**: if you want a copy, you'd have to scan it (Chapter 21). A printer or hybrid keeps the photo digitally, so you can print it again, and again.

CHAPTER 3

The Four Big Names: Instax, Polaroid, Kodak and HP

Almost everything you'll see in a store comes from four brands. Here's what each one is known for.

Fujifilm Instax

Instax is made by Fujifilm and is the best seller. It comes in three film sizes: **mini** (about the size of a credit card), **Square** and **Wide** (twice as wide as mini). The analog cameras include the **mini 12**, the newer **mini 13**, the **mini 41** and **mini 99**, the **SQ40** for Square film and the **Wide 400**. The hybrid cameras include the **mini Evo**, **mini Evo 2**, **mini LiPlay** and **Wide Evo**. The **mini Link 3** is Instax's phone printer, and there are Link printers for Square and Wide film too.

GOOD TO KNOW

New in 2026: the instax mini 13

Fujifilm announced the **mini 13** in March 2026 for the U.S., with a suggested price of $93.95 and availability from about late June 2026. It's the mini 12 with a 2-second and a 10-second self-timer added, plus a strap that doubles as a stand for tilting the camera up. It uses the same mini film and two AA batteries. Store prices may be a little lower; check the current price.

Polaroid

Polaroid makes the classic square-ish prints with the wide white border. The **Polaroid Now** (now in its third generation) takes **i-Type** film and also older-style **600** film. The little **Polaroid Go** uses its own smaller **Go** film. Polaroid also sells the **Hi-Print 2x3**, a pocket phone printer, and the **Polaroid Lab**, which turns a phone photo into a real Polaroid print on film.

Kodak

Kodak-branded instant products include the **Mini Shot** cameras (for example the **Mini Shot 3 Retro**, which makes 4x4-inch square prints), the **Smile** camera and printer, the **Step** printer and camera, and the **Mini 2** and other Kodak Mini phone printers. The Step and Smile use 2x3-inch ZINK paper; the Mini Shot and Mini printers use all-in-one cartridges.

HP Sprocket

HP Sprocket printers are small phone printers that use 2x3-inch sticky-backed ZINK paper. There have been several models over the years (Sprocket, Sprocket 2nd Edition, Sprocket Select, Sprocket Plus and the Sprocket 2-in-1, which is a camera too). They all work with the free **HP Sprocket** app.

Brand	Best known for	Prints on
Instax	Easy, cheerful cameras; three print sizes	Instax mini, Square or Wide film
Polaroid	The classic look with a big white border	i-Type, 600 or Go film
Kodak	Cameras and printers that print digital photos	ZINK paper or cartridges
HP Sprocket	Pocket phone printers, sticker prints	HP ZINK paper

CHAPTER 4

Which One Do You Have?

Before you buy film or paper, take one minute to find the exact model name. Buying the wrong film is the most common (and most annoying) mistake, because each type fits only its own cameras.

Find the model name

1. Look at the front and top of the camera or printer. The brand and model are usually printed there: "instax mini 12," "Polaroid Now," "sprocket."
2. If not, turn it over. The bottom or the inside of the battery or film door usually has a label with the model name or number.
3. Still not sure? The original box or the little printed guide will say. For a printer, the phone app also shows the model once it's connected (on HP Sprocket, look in the app's printer information).
4. Write it down on the cheat-sheet at the end of this book.

Then match it to its film or paper

If you have	Buy this
Instax mini cameras and printers	**Instax mini** film only. Square and Wide film won't fit.
Instax Square cameras and printers	**Instax Square** film.
Instax Wide cameras and printers	**Instax Wide** film.
Instax mini Evo, mini LiPlay	**Instax mini** film (they're hybrids, but they still print on mini film).
Polaroid Now and other i-Type cameras	**i-Type** film is the best match; **600** film works too.
Polaroid Go	**Polaroid Go** film only.
Vintage Polaroid 600 cameras	**600** film. i-Type won't work: it has no battery in the pack, and those old cameras rely on it.
HP Sprocket	**HP Sprocket (ZINK) photo paper** in the size for your model.
Kodak Step, Smile	**Kodak 2x3-inch ZINK paper**.
Kodak Mini Shot, Mini 2	**Kodak cartridges** for that model and print size.

If you have	Buy this
Polaroid Hi-Print 2x3	**Hi-Print 2x3 paper cartridges** only.

HEADS UP

Look for the exact words on the box

Film boxes say which cameras they fit, for example "instax mini" or "for i-Type cameras." A box that just says "instant film" in a marketplace listing, with no brand, is a warning sign (Chapter 25).

PART 2

Choosing the Right One

Print sizes side by side, film camera or phone printer, what each print honestly costs, and how to pick a gift a grandparent will actually enjoy using.

CHAPTER 5

Print Sizes and Film Types Side by Side

The size of the print is the biggest difference between these gadgets, and it's worth picturing before you buy. Here they are, from smallest to largest, in round numbers.

Film or paper	Roughly the size of	Used by
HP / Kodak ZINK 2x3	A wallet photo (2 x 3 inches)	HP Sprocket, Kodak Step and Smile
Instax mini	A credit card (picture about 2.4 x 1.8 in.)	Instax mini cameras, mini Evo, mini Link 3
Polaroid Hi-Print / Kodak Mini	A credit card (2.1 x 3.4 in.)	Polaroid Hi-Print 2x3, Kodak Mini 2 and Mini Shot
Polaroid Go	A small square, about half a classic Polaroid	Polaroid Go only
Instax Square	A coaster-sized square	Instax SQ cameras and Square Link
Polaroid i-Type / 600	The classic Polaroid with the big white border	Polaroid Now, vintage 600 cameras
Kodak 4x4 cartridge	A 4-inch square	Kodak Mini Shot 3 Retro
Instax Wide	A postcard-ish rectangle, twice a mini	Instax Wide 400, Wide Evo, Wide Link

Which looks best?

- **Film (Instax and Polaroid)** has the soft, dreamy look people love. Polaroid has the most "vintage" character; Instax is brighter and more predictable.
- **Cartridge (dye-sub) prints** from Kodak Mini and Polaroid Hi-Print look most like a drugstore photo, sharp and true to color.
- **ZINK prints** are the smallest and cheapest, a bit less vivid, and handy as stickers.

TIP

Bigger is kinder to older eyes

If the prints are for someone with weaker eyesight, lean toward **Instax Wide**, **Instax Square** or a **Polaroid**. The mini size is charming, but faces in a group photo can be very small.

CHAPTER 6

Instant Camera, Phone Printer or Hybrid?

This is the real decision, and it comes down to one question: do you want to **take** photos with it, or **print** the photos you already take with your phone?

Choose a film instant camera if...

- You want the fun of the moment: press, print, pass it around the table.
- You like the simplest possible gadget: no app, no screen, no phone needed.
- You don't mind that every press of the button uses a sheet, good photo or not.

Choose a pocket phone printer if...

- Most of your photos (or the grandchildren's) are already on a phone.
- You want to choose your best photo, crop it, and only then print it.
- You'd like to print the same photo twice, or print photos family members send you.
- You're comfortable with a phone app, or someone in the family is.

Choose a hybrid camera if...

- You want a camera to carry around, but you want to see the picture on a screen first.
- You'd like it to double as a printer for phone photos. The Instax mini Evo, for example, can print from your phone with the free instax mini Evo app, and Kodak's Mini Shot 3 Retro can print from the camera or from a phone over Bluetooth.

Type	In a nutshell
Film camera	Simplest to use. No copies. Each print costs the same whether it's good or not.
Phone printer	Needs a phone and an app. You print only your best. Prints can be repeated.
Hybrid	Most features, more buttons to learn, needs charging. Prints only the shots you choose.

FROM BILL

My honest suggestion

For a grandparent who doesn't use a smartphone much, a simple film camera like the Instax mini 12 or mini 13 is the happiest choice. For someone who's always showing you photos on their phone, a phone printer gets those photos onto the fridge.

CHAPTER 7

What Each Print Really Costs

The camera or printer is a one-time cost. The film or paper is what you'll keep buying, so it's worth knowing the cost of each print before you choose. These are the makers' own list prices in November 2026, rounded. Stores and holiday sales are often lower, and bigger packs cost less per print, so check the current price.

Film or paper	Typical pack (list price)	About per print
Instax mini	Twin pack, 20 prints, $25.99	about $1.30
Instax Wide	Twin pack, 20 prints, $35.99	about $1.80
Polaroid i-Type	One pack, 8 prints, $18.99	about $2.40
Polaroid Go	Double pack, 16 prints, $21.99	about $1.40
HP Sprocket ZINK	Packs of 20 to 100 sheets	about 50 cents
Polaroid Hi-Print, Kodak cartridges	Cartridge packs of 20 to 50	check current price

Ways to spend less

- **Buy bigger packs.** Polaroid's own site lists a lower price per pack when you buy three or five.
- **Print, don't snap, when you can.** With a phone printer or hybrid you only pay for the photos you keep. With a film camera, every miss costs the same as a keeper.
- **Learn the light rules** in Part 4. Most wasted film is a photo taken in a dim room or into the sun.
- **Buy from the maker or a big-name store**, not from a "70% off" website (Chapter 25).

HEADS UP

Film has a use-by date

Polaroid says its film expires 12 months after it's made, and old film often gives pale, washed-out prints. Don't stock up on a mountain of film you won't use within the year. Instax film has a date stamped on the box too.

CHAPTER 8

Gift Advice: Choosing One for a Grandparent

An instant camera or photo printer can be a lovely gift, for a grandparent or from one. A little thought up front means it gets used, not tucked in a drawer.

Questions to ask first

1. **Do they use a smartphone comfortably?** If not, choose a film camera, which needs no phone at all.
2. **Are their hands steady and nimble?** Some cameras have small buttons and fiddly doors. Bigger cameras like the Instax Wide 400 or Polaroid Now are easier to hold.
3. **How are their eyes?** Choose a bigger print size (Chapter 5).
4. **Do they want to take photos, or print photos the family sends?** For the second, a phone printer is the gift, and it helps if a family member sets up the app.
5. **Who'll buy the film?** A camera with no film is a disappointment.

Make the gift ready to use

- **Include film or paper.** Buy the right type (Chapter 4), and add a spare pack or two.
- **Include batteries** if the camera takes AA batteries (Instax mini 12 and mini 13 take two; the Wide 400 takes four), or charge it before you wrap it if it's rechargeable.
- **Load the first pack together.** Show them the yellow marks or the right way up, and take the first photo together.
- **Set up the app for them** on a phone printer, and pair it with their phone (Part 5).
- **Write the film name on a sticky note** inside the box lid, so reordering is easy.
- **Add a small album** or a box for the prints (Chapter 21).

TIP

A gift from a grandparent

Grandchildren love instant cameras too. If you're giving one to a youngster, a film multipack is a thoughtful extra, since film runs out quickly at a birthday party.

HEADS UP

Holiday bargains: check the seller

Instant cameras are on gift lists every year, and that's exactly when fake "clearance" websites pop up. Fujifilm warns about sites pretending to sell genuine Instax products. Buy from the brand's own site or a store you know (Chapter 25).

PART 3

Setting Up: Batteries, Film and Paper

Powering up, and loading Instax film, Polaroid film, ZINK paper and print cartridges the right way the first time, so no sheet is wasted.

CHAPTER 9

Batteries and Charging

Some instant cameras run on ordinary AA batteries. Others, and every phone printer, have a built-in battery you charge with a USB cable, just like a phone. Here's which is which.

Camera or printer	Power
Instax mini 12 and mini 13	Two **AA** alkaline batteries. Nothing to charge.
Instax Wide 400	Four **AA** alkaline batteries.
Polaroid Now	A built-in rechargeable battery. Charge it with the USB cable before first use. The newest model (Generation 3) has a **USB-C** plug; older ones use Micro USB.
Instax mini Evo	A built-in battery, about 2 to 3 hours to charge fully; good for about 100 prints.
Instax mini Link 3, HP Sprocket, Kodak, Polaroid Hi-Print	Built-in rechargeable batteries, charged with the USB cable in the box.

Charging a Polaroid Now

1. Plug the USB cable into the camera and into a USB phone charger or a computer.
2. The small light next to the plug blinks while it charges. A full charge takes about 1 to 2 hours.
3. On a Generation 3 camera, the light shows the level: **green** is full, **orange** about half, **red** low.
4. Polaroid says a full charge lasts about **15 packs** of film, even with the flash.

HEADS UP

Weak batteries cause blank Instax prints

Fujifilm says low batteries are a common reason for blank or poorly ejected prints, because most of the power goes into pushing the print out. If prints start coming out oddly, put in fresh AA batteries first, with the lens out (switched on) when you change them.

TIP

Charge before you wrap a gift

Rechargeable cameras and printers often arrive only partly charged. Charge it fully before the big day, so the first photo can happen the moment the paper comes off.

CHAPTER 10

Loading Instax Film

All Instax film loads the same way, whether it's a mini, Square or Wide camera, a mini Evo or a mini Link printer. The secret is one small **yellow mark**.

1. Open the foil wrapper and take out the film cartridge. Hold it by its edges; don't press on the middle.
2. Look for the small **yellow stripe** on the top right of the cartridge.
3. On the back of the camera, slide and hold the **film door lock**, then open the film door.
4. Inside you'll see the same **yellow mark** in the top right corner. Line the two up and slip the cartridge in. It should drop in easily. Never force it.
5. Close the film door. The camera pushes out a **black film cover** by itself. Take it and throw it away.
6. You're ready. The film counter shows how many shots are left (10 in a new pack).

HEADS UP

Don't open the door until the pack is finished

Opening the film door partway through a pack lets light in, and the next sheets come out white. Wait until the counter says 0, then open the door and take out the empty cartridge.

If the film won't come out

Fujifilm says a knock or a drop can nudge the cartridge out of line. Wait until the pack is finished if you can; otherwise, re-seat it with the yellow marks lined up. If that doesn't help, try a new cartridge. And remember: mini cameras take **only mini film**. Square and Wide film won't fit.

CHAPTER 11

Loading Polaroid Film

Polaroid film packs load from the front of the camera. Each pack has a **darkslide** on top, a dark card that protects the film from light and pops out by itself on the first press.

1. Press the button on the side of the camera to open the film door.
2. Slide the pack in with the **darkslide facing up** and the small **pull tab facing out**. Leave the pull tab on; you'll need it later.
3. Close the door firmly.
4. The camera pushes the darkslide out under the **film shield** (the thin flap over the slot). Lift the shield gently, take the darkslide, and let the shield roll back. Throw the darkslide away.
5. Don't pull the darkslide out yourself before the camera ejects it.

> TIP
>
> **If the darkslide doesn't come out**
>
> Polaroid says to take the pack out and put it back in, pushing it all the way to the back of the camera. To remove an empty pack, open the door and pull the tab.

The **Polaroid Go** loads the same way with its own smaller Go film. A pack of i-Type or 600 film holds 8 photos; that goes quickly, so keep a spare pack handy.

CHAPTER 12

Loading ZINK Paper and Print Cartridges

HP Sprocket: paper plus a blue card

Every pack of HP Sprocket paper comes with a **blue card** (HP now calls it the **Print Quality Card**; it used to be the Smartsheet). It cleans and tunes the printer, so it goes in with the paper.

1. Slide off or open the paper cover (on most models, the top lid slides forward).
2. Unwrap a pack of HP Sprocket photo paper. Keep the sheets and the blue card together.
3. Put the **blue card on the bottom**, with its **barcode facing down**.
4. Put up to **10 sheets** of photo paper on top, with the **HP logos facing down**.
5. Close the cover. The first time you print, the blue card feeds through by itself to tune the printer. Throw it away once it comes out, or keep it until the 10 sheets are used, as your model's guide says.

> TIP
> **Save one blue card**
> HP says you don't need the blue card for every pack unless the prints show streaks or the paper doesn't feed well. Keeping one in the box for those moments is handy.

Kodak Step and Smile: ZINK paper

Kodak's Step and Smile models use Kodak 2x3-inch ZINK paper, which is sticky-backed and smudge-proof. The idea is the same as the Sprocket: open the paper door, put the sheets in the way the picture inside the door shows (along with any colored card that came in the pack), and close it. Use Kodak's paper for your exact model.

Polaroid Hi-Print and Kodak Mini: cartridges

These printers use an all-in-one cartridge that holds both the paper and the color ribbon, so there's no loose paper to line up.

1. Open the cartridge door on the printer.
2. Slide the cartridge in the way the arrow or picture on it shows, until it sits flat or clicks.
3. Close the door. Don't pull out the paper or touch the ribbon.
4. When the sheets are used up, swap in a new cartridge.

A Polaroid Hi-Print 2x3 cartridge holds **10 sheets** of sticky-back paper, and only Hi-Print 2x3 cartridges fit. Kodak Mini printers and Mini Shot cameras need Kodak cartridges made for that model and print size.

PART 4

Taking Good Instant Photos

Light, distance and the weather: the three things that decide whether a film print comes out bright and clear, plus a word on hybrid cameras.

CHAPTER 13

Light and Distance: The Two Big Rules

Instant film doesn't have a phone's clever processing to rescue a photo. Nearly every disappointing print comes down to too little light, too much light, or standing the wrong distance away.

Rule one: plenty of soft light

- **Outdoors is easiest.** Bright daylight, open shade or a cloudy day all give lovely prints.
- **Keep the sun behind you** or to the side, not behind the person. Shooting into the sun gives a dark face against a white sky.
- **Indoors, the flash does the work**, but only for a few feet. Stand close, and turn on the room lights too.
- **Avoid mirrors and windows** straight ahead. The flash bounces back as a white blob.

Rule two: the right distance

Most cameras aim for people a few feet away. Too far, and the flash can't reach; too close, and the picture is blurry, unless you use close-up mode.

Instax mini 12 and mini 13

- Twist the lens to turn the camera on. Twist it a little further for **close-up mode**.
- Close-up mode is for subjects about **12 to 20 inches** (30 to 50 cm) away: a face, a cake, flowers. Further than that, use the normal setting.
- The flash fires on every photo. That's normal; the camera sets the brightness itself, even in close-up mode.
- In close-up mode the viewfinder is adjusted so what you see matches the print.

Quick answers for common situations

You want to photograph	Do this
A birthday cake with candles	Turn on the room lights, step in close, and let the flash do its job. Use close-up mode if you're within about 20 inches.
A group at the dinner table	Stand back just far enough to fit everyone, no more than a few steps. Ask the group to squeeze together.
Grandchildren playing outside	Perfect light. Keep the sun behind you and wait for a still moment; instant cameras don't freeze fast action well.

You want to photograph	Do this
A beach or snow scene	Very bright scenes can come out pale. Turn so the bright sky isn't filling the frame, and focus on the people.
Evening indoors	Get close and add every light in the room. Far-away subjects will come out dark.
Flowers in the garden	Close-up mode, soft daylight, and hold very still as you press.

TIP

Fill the frame

Instant prints are small. Step in until the faces fill most of the viewfinder. Two or three people make a better instant photo than the whole family lined up across the yard.

GOOD TO KNOW

The viewfinder is a little off to the side

On most film cameras you look through a small window above or beside the lens, not through the lens itself. For very close photos, aim a touch toward the lens side so heads don't get cut off.

CHAPTER 14

Polaroid Photos: Shield, Wait, and Keep It Mild

Polaroid film is a little fussier than Instax, and the reward is that classic look. Three habits make all the difference.

1. Shield the print from light

1. When the photo comes out, leave it under the film shield for about **10 seconds**.
2. Then take it out and lay it **face down**, away from bright light, for about **10 minutes**.
3. Even after that, keep it out of strong light until it's finished. A pocket or the empty film box works.

2. Give it time

Polaroid color film takes roughly **15 minutes** to finish developing, and black-and-white about 5. The exact time is printed on the back of the film box.

3. Keep the film at a mild temperature

Polaroid says film works best between about **55°F and 82°F** (13 to 28°C). On a hot day, prints can turn pinkish; in the cold, they look bluish. On a hot day, keep the camera and film in the shade or a cool bag; in winter, keep them inside your coat.

> TIP
>
> **Look at the camera's light before you press**
>
> Many Polaroid cameras flash a light or show a symbol when the battery is low or the film is out. Check the little screen or lights before a special photo.

CHAPTER 15

Developing, Weather and Storing Film

Instax: about 90 seconds, and no shaking

- An Instax print takes about **90 seconds** to appear, a little longer in the cold.
- **Don't shake it.** Fujifilm says shaking can make the picture patchy. Don't bend or squeeze it either.
- Lay it **flat in the shade** while it develops.
- Below about **41°F** (5°C), keep the print somewhere warm, like an inside pocket, so it develops properly.
- If the film has been somewhere very cold or hot, let it come back to room temperature before you shoot.

HEADS UP

The hot car

Never leave film or a loaded camera in a closed car in summer. Fujifilm and Polaroid both warn that heat spoils film.

Storing unused film

- Keep film in its sealed foil in a **cool, dry place**.
- Polaroid suggests the **fridge** for longer storage, never the freezer, which ruins the chemistry. Let it warm up before you load it.
- Use film before the date on the box. Polaroid says its film expires 12 months after it's made.

CHAPTER 16

Hybrid Cameras: Look First, Then Print

A hybrid camera, like the **Instax mini Evo** or **Kodak Mini Shot 3 Retro**, takes digital photos you see on a screen. You print only the ones you like. It's the most forgiving choice for someone who doesn't want to waste film.

Using an Instax mini Evo

1. Charge it fully (about 2 to 3 hours) and load mini film the usual way (Chapter 10).
2. Take your photo. It's saved inside the camera or on a memory card.
3. Look at it on the screen. If you like it, print it with the camera's print lever.
4. Want another copy later? The camera keeps a **print history** of up to 50 recent prints you can reprint.

The mini Evo also prints photos from your phone with the free **instax mini Evo** app. Fujifilm notes that phone photos print at a lower resolution than photos taken with the camera itself, which is fine for small prints. A full charge gives about 100 prints (about 90 on the newer mini Evo 2).

Kodak Mini Shot 3 Retro

This Kodak takes photos on its screen and prints 4x4-inch square prints from a cartridge. It can also print photos from your phone's gallery over Bluetooth.

> **FROM BILL**
>
> **Why I like hybrids for beginners**
>
> With a hybrid, a blurry photo costs nothing. You just take another, and print the good one. If someone is nervous about wasting expensive film, that peace of mind is worth a lot.

PART 5

Printing from Your Phone

The free apps, connecting over Bluetooth the right way, and step-by-step printing with Instax, HP Sprocket, Kodak and Polaroid.

CHAPTER 17

Before You Print: The App and Bluetooth

Every phone printer works through its own free app. The app finds the printer over Bluetooth, lets you pick and tidy up a photo, and sends it to print. Here's the app for each one.

Printer	Free app to install
Instax mini Link 3	**INSTAX MINI LINK** app (Square and Wide Link printers have their own Link apps)
Instax mini Evo	**instax mini Evo** app
HP Sprocket	**HP Sprocket** app
Kodak Step printers	**KODAK STEP Prints** app
Kodak Mini printers	**KODAK Mini Shot** app
Polaroid Hi-Print 2x3	**Polaroid Hi-Print** app

Four rules that save a lot of frustration

1. **Get the app from the App Store or Google Play**, and check that the maker's name (Fujifilm, HP, Kodak or Polaroid) is under the title.
2. **Connect from inside the app**, not from your phone's Bluetooth settings. Fujifilm says connecting from the phone's settings screen may not work properly.
3. **Say Allow** when the app asks for Bluetooth, photos and, on many phones, location or "nearby devices." Fujifilm says location services must be on for its Link printers to connect.
4. **One phone at a time.** To connect a second phone, the first one usually has to disconnect.

What the permission questions mean

The app asks for	What it's for
Bluetooth	Lets the app talk to the printer. Needed.
Photos	Lets the app see the photos you want to print. Allowing access to all photos is simplest; you can also choose only certain photos.
Location or Nearby devices	Phones use this to find Bluetooth gadgets nearby. Fujifilm says its Link printers need it on to connect.
Notifications	Optional. Saying no won't stop printing.

The app asks for	What it's for
Camera	Only needed if you want to take a photo from inside the app.

Said no by mistake? Open your phone's **Settings**, find the printer's app in the list of apps, and turn the permission on there.

GOOD TO KNOW

Pairing in general

If Bluetooth itself is new to you, my Bluetooth Pairing manual explains it from the start. For these printers, though, the app does the pairing for you.

CHAPTER 18

Printing with an Instax mini Link 3

The first time

1. Charge the printer and load a pack of mini film (Chapter 10).
2. Install and open the **INSTAX MINI LINK** app. Accept the terms and choose your region.
3. On the **Select printer** screen, choose **INSTAX MINI LINK 3** and tap **OK**.
4. Turn the printer on by holding the power button for about 1 second, until the light comes on. Tap **Next** in the app.
5. When the app finds the printer, tap **Connect**. If it lists more than one, the name of yours is on the bottom of the printer.

Printing a photo

1. In the app, choose to print a photo and pick one from your phone.
2. Adjust it if you like: zoom, move, or add a frame.
3. Tap the print button. The print slides out of the top and develops in about 90 seconds.

Next time

Turn the printer on, open the app, and it reconnects. If it doesn't, tap **Add your printer** at the top of the app and choose your printer from the list.

> TIP
> **Google Pixel phones**
> On a Google Pixel, a pop-up may offer to set the printer up automatically when it's nearby. That's Google's Fast Pair feature, and it's fine to use.

CHAPTER 19

Printing with an HP Sprocket

The first time

1. Charge the Sprocket and load paper with the blue card (Chapter 12).
2. Install the free **HP Sprocket** app. HP says the app is needed to connect and print.
3. Turn the printer on, and make sure Bluetooth is on in your phone's settings.
4. Open the app and follow the setup steps on the welcome screen.
5. If it doesn't find the printer, tap the **Menu** icon, then **sprocket**, then **Manage Printers**, then **Add New Printer**.

Printing a photo

1. Choose a photo in the app.
2. Tap **Edit** if you'd like to crop it or add a frame, then tap the check mark to save.
3. Tap the **Print** icon. The first print of a new pack feeds the blue card through first.

TIP

Sticker prints

Sprocket paper has a peel-off sticky back. Peel off the backing and you have a photo sticker for a card, a notebook or the fridge.

GOOD TO KNOW

Several Sprocket models

HP has made several Sprockets (the original, 2nd Edition, Select, Plus, 200, Studio and 2-in-1). The app screens differ a little between them and over time, so if a word doesn't match, look for the closest one.

CHAPTER 20

Printing with Kodak and Polaroid Hi-Print

Kodak Step printers

1. Charge the printer and load Kodak ZINK paper (Chapter 12).
2. Install the free **KODAK STEP Prints** app.
3. Turn the printer on, open the app, and follow its prompts to connect over Bluetooth.
4. Pick a photo, adjust it if you like, and tap print.

Kodak Mini printers and Mini Shot cameras

Kodak's Mini photo printers use the free **KODAK Mini Shot** app, which has filters, cropping and card templates. Connect from inside the app the same way. A Mini Shot camera can also print straight from its own screen with no phone at all.

Polaroid Hi-Print 2x3

1. Charge the printer and put in a Hi-Print 2x3 paper cartridge.
2. Install the free **Polaroid Hi-Print** app. It needs iOS 16 or later, or Android 7.0 or later.
3. Turn the printer on, open the app and connect to the printer over Bluetooth.
4. Pick a photo, add a frame or template if you like, and print. It takes under a minute.

> **FROM BILL**
>
> **Print the ones the family sends**
>
> The best use I know for these printers: when the grandchildren's photos arrive by text, save one to your phone's photos (press and hold the photo in the text and choose Save), then print it from the app.

PART 6

Keeping Your Prints and Fixing Problems

How to store instant prints so they last, how to make copies, and calm fixes for blank prints, stuck film and printers that won't connect.

CHAPTER 21

Storing Prints and Making Copies

Keep them out of the sun

- **Direct sunlight fades** instant prints over time. Keep them in a dry, dark place, away from sunny windowsills.
- **Framing one?** Polaroid recommends UV-protective glass; ordinary glass lets the light fade the photo.
- **Avoid damp places** like a basement or bathroom. Fujifilm suggests an album kept somewhere cool, dry and airy.
- **Don't bend, crease or pierce** a film print. There are developing chemicals inside its layers.

Wait a month before sealing Polaroids away

Polaroid says its prints are still drying for about **30 days**. During that first month, let them sit somewhere cool and airy, and don't seal them in plastic sleeves. After that, an album is fine.

Making a copy

A film print is one of a kind. To keep a copy, or to send it to family, take a photo of it with your phone:

1. Lay the print flat by a window in soft daylight, out of direct sun.
2. Hold the phone straight above it, so the print looks square on the screen, and avoid glare on the shiny surface.
3. Take the photo, then crop away the table around it.
4. Or use your phone's document scanner: on an iPhone, the **Notes** app can **Scan Documents**, and it straightens the picture for you.

TIP

Printers keep the original

If you printed from your phone, the original is still in your phone's photos. Printing again is easy, and my Photo Printing and Photo Books manual covers bigger prints from the same photo.

CHAPTER 22

Fixing Film Camera Problems

Most problems with instant cameras have simple causes. Find what you see in the list below.

What you see	Likely cause and fix
Prints come out completely white	Light reached the film, usually because the film door was opened before the pack was finished. The next sheet or two may be white; the rest are often fine.
White or poorly ejected Instax prints, door never opened	Weak batteries. Fujifilm says to put in fresh AA batteries with the lens out.
Prints come out completely black	Usually no light reached the film, for example a lens cap, a finger over the lens, or a fault. Check the lens and try one more photo in good light.
Too dark	The room was too dim or you were too far away for the flash. Move closer and add light.
Too pale or washed out	Too much light (bright sun straight on), expired film, or film that got hot.
Pinkish or bluish Polaroid	The film was too warm (pink) or too cold (blue). See Chapter 14.
Patchy or streaky	The print was shaken, bent or squeezed while developing, or the rollers need a clean.

Film won't come out, or the darkslide is stuck

1. Don't pull on a print that's stuck halfway. You can damage the rollers.
2. Check the batteries or the charge first.
3. Instax: a knock can shift the cartridge. Re-seat it with the yellow marks lined up, or try a new pack.
4. Polaroid: if the darkslide didn't come out, take the pack out and push it back in, all the way to the back of the camera.

GOOD TO KNOW

Still stuck? Ask the maker

For Instax products, Fujifilm's U.S. contact center is **1-800-800-3854**. Polaroid, Kodak and HP have support pages on their own websites. Use the number on the maker's site or in the box, never one from a search ad (Chapter 25).

CHAPTER 23

Fixing Phone Printer Problems

The app can't find the printer

1. Make sure the printer is on and charged. HP says the Sprocket battery should be at least **25%**.
2. Hold the phone close to the printer.
3. Turn Bluetooth off and on again in your phone's settings, and restart the phone.
4. Check the app is allowed to use Bluetooth and location or nearby devices (Chapter 17).
5. Instax: in the phone's Bluetooth list, delete any old **INSTAX-** entries, then connect again from the app.
6. HP: other Bluetooth gadgets, such as earbuds, can get in the way the first time. Disconnect them while you set up.
7. Another phone may already be connected. Disconnect it in that phone's app.
8. Still nothing? The maker's guide explains how to reset the printer.

Prints have streaks, lines or odd colors

- **HP Sprocket:** load the blue Print Quality Card from a pack (barcode down) and print again. HP says it's only needed again when there are print quality or paper feed problems.
- **Check the paper is the right way up** (HP logos down on Sprocket paper).
- **Use the maker's own paper** or cartridge for your model.
- **Cartridge printers:** make sure the cartridge sits flat and the door is fully shut.

Paper jammed

1. Turn the printer off.
2. Open the paper door and gently remove any loose sheets.
3. If a sheet is caught in the slot, ease it out slowly. Don't yank.
4. Reload no more than the recommended number of sheets (10 for a Sprocket), and print again.

TIP

The photo looks small or cropped

Phone photos are a different shape from most prints, so the app trims the edges. Before you print, pinch and slide the photo in the app's edit screen to choose what stays in.

CHAPTER 24

Everyday Care and Taking It Along

Caring for your camera or printer

- **Wipe the lens** with a soft, dry glasses cloth. No paper towels.
- **Keep it in a case or soft bag**, especially the film door and lens.
- **Take AA batteries out** if you won't use the camera for a few months, so they can't leak.
- **Charge rechargeable models** every few months, even when you're not using them.
- **Keep film and paper sealed** until you need them, somewhere cool and dry.

Taking it on a trip

- Pack a spare film pack or paper pack. They're light, and it's no fun running out on day one.
- Keep film out of a hot car and direct sun (Chapter 15).
- Flying? Polaroid has a guide on its website about protecting instant film at airport security. Read it before you go.
- A small envelope or the empty film box keeps new prints safe in a bag.

Happy ways to use your prints

Idea	How it works
A guest book	At a party or reunion, take one photo of each guest and have them sign the border or a page beside it.
Letters and cards	Tuck a print (or stick a sticker print) into a birthday card for someone far away.
A fridge or cork board	Swap the photos each season so there's always something new to look at.
A recipe or memory box	Pair a print of the cook with the handwritten recipe card.
A garden or travel diary	One print per day of a trip, with a line or two written underneath.
Name labels	Sticker prints on drawers, toy bins or a medicine box help everyone find things.

Writing on prints

- Wait until a film print is fully developed and dry before you write on it.
- Write on the **white border**, not on the picture.

- A fine permanent marker works best on the glossy border; ballpoint pens can smear or press dents through.
- Add the date and names. In twenty years, someone will be glad you did.

FROM BILL

A party tip

At a family gathering, set the camera on the table with a spare pack and let everyone take a turn. Have a pen ready so people can write the date and names on the white border once the print is dry.

PART 7

Staying Safe When You Buy

Fake bargain websites, questionable film and look-alike apps: how to spot them before you pay.

CHAPTER 25

Fake Deals, Fake Film and Other Traps

Instant cameras and film are popular gifts, so scammers use them as bait, especially around the holidays. Here are the traps worth knowing.

SCAM ALERT

The "clearance" website

Fujifilm warns about fraudulent websites that use its logos and photos to sell Instax cameras and film at a vastly reduced price. You pay, and either nothing arrives or something else does. They often show up as ads on social media or in search results. Buy from the maker's own store or a store you know.

SCAM ALERT

Film that's too cheap to be real

A huge stack of instant film for a few dollars, an unbranded box sold as "instant film," or packs with no foil wrapper are warning signs. At best it's old, expired or heat-damaged film that gives pale prints; at worst you get nothing at all. Genuine film comes sealed in foil with a use-by date on the box.

SCAM ALERT

Look-alike apps

The real printer apps are free, and they're made by Fujifilm, HP, Kodak or Polaroid. Apps with similar names that ask for a subscription, or that are full of ads, aren't the right ones. In the App Store or Google Play, check the maker's name under the app's title.

SCAM ALERT

Fake support numbers

If you search for "Instax help" or "Sprocket support," an ad at the top may lead to a fake helpline that asks to connect to your computer or wants payment by gift card. Real support numbers are on the maker's own website and in the box.

How to buy safely

1. Buy from the maker's own website, or a big store you already know, in person or online.
2. Type the store's address yourself instead of tapping an ad.

3. Check that the film box says exactly which cameras it fits (Chapter 4) and has a use-by date.
4. Pay with a credit card, which gives you the most protection if something goes wrong.
5. Never pay with gift cards, a wire transfer or a payment app for a stranger's "deal."

> **TIP**
>
> **Compatible paper**
>
> You'll see "compatible" ZINK paper and cartridges from other brands. Some work, some don't feed well. If you try one, buy a small pack first. The maker's own paper is the safe choice.

Already paid a site you're unsure about?

- Call your card company or bank using the number on the back of your card, and explain.
- Report it at **ReportFraud.ftc.gov**.
- Gave someone access to your computer? Turn it off and call me or someone you trust to check it.

PART 8

Help and Your Cheat-Sheet

An honest word about when a hand is worth it, and the whole guide on one page.

CHAPTER 26

When to Call Bill

I've written this guide so you can enjoy your instant camera or photo printer on your own. But part of being helpful is being honest about when a hand saves you time and worry, so here's my straight advice, with no pressure.

Times it's well worth a call

- **Setting up a phone printer**: installing the app, allowing permissions and pairing it with your phone.
- **A printer that won't connect** after you've tried the steps in Chapter 23.
- **Getting family photos from texts and email** onto your phone so you can print them.
- **Making copies** of a box of instant prints, so the whole family can have them.
- **Choosing a gift** that fits the person, and getting it ready to use before you give it.
- **A website or deal you're not sure about.** Ask before you pay.

What working with me is like

I work at your pace: no rushing, no talking down, and no jargon. I explain what I'm doing in plain words, and I'll tell you honestly when you don't need to buy anything. I serve Portage County, Ohio, and I bring more than 30 years of professional experience to every visit.

FROM BILL

How to reach me

Call or text **(330) 200-8042**, or book a time at **billshometech.com/book**. Help is **$49 remote · $99 in your home**. If I'm with another customer, my AI receptionist, Sophie, will answer and make sure I get back to you. Have your camera or printer, its cable and your phone nearby.

Thank you for letting me help. A photo you can hold in your hand is a small joy, and now you know how to make plenty of them.

— Bill

CHAPTER 27

Your Instant Photo Cheat-Sheet

Keep this summary with your camera or printer. The whole guide, boiled down.

Loading, in one line each

What	How
Instax film	Line up the **yellow marks**, close the door, throw away the black cover
Polaroid film	**Darkslide up**, pull tab out; the camera ejects the darkslide
HP Sprocket paper	**Blue card** on the bottom (barcode down), up to 10 sheets, **HP logos down**
Cartridges	Slide in the way the arrow shows; don't touch the ribbon

Good photos

- Plenty of light, sun behind you, people a few feet away.
- Instax close-up: twist the lens further, 12 to 20 inches away.
- Instax: about 90 seconds, lay it flat, don't shake. Polaroid: face down, about 15 minutes.
- Keep film between about 55°F and 82°F, never in a hot car.

The free apps

Printer	App
Instax mini Link 3	INSTAX MINI LINK
HP Sprocket	HP Sprocket
Kodak Step / Kodak Mini	KODAK STEP Prints / KODAK Mini Shot
Polaroid Hi-Print	Polaroid Hi-Print

Keep handy

Item	
My camera or printer model	_____
Film or paper it takes	_____
Where I buy it	_____
Maker's support number	_____

Safety, in three lines

- Buy film and paper from the maker or a store you know, never a "70% off" website.
- Use only the maker's own free app.
- Get support numbers from the maker's website, never from an ad.

WHAT THIS DOES FOR YOU

You've got this

You know which film or paper you need, how to load it, how to take bright, clear instant photos, how to print from your phone, and how to keep your prints safe. When you'd like a hand, call (330) 200-8042.