

## Preparing a stencil image from a photo using Microsoft Word

Here are some notes I made while experimenting with freezer-paper stencilling. I don't have any particularly fancy graphics software, so decided to try using Microsoft Word to create stencils from photos.

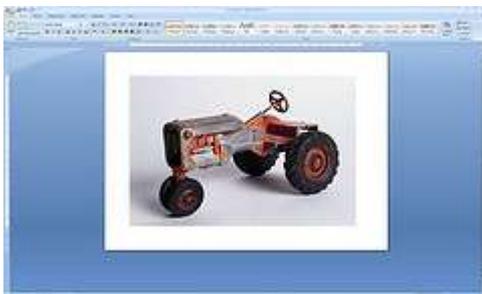
I have detailed two methods, using Microsoft Word (the version I have is 2007).

The first is super-quick and easy, but gives less accurate results. With the right image (simple, with good contrast) it would work very well.

The second method involves a little bit more work, but gives quite a good result on lower contrast images.

### Method 1: Converting the image to black-and-white

1. Start **Microsoft Word** and create a new document
2. Insert the image that you wish to use. In my example I have used a picture of a vintage tin toy tractor that I found in the **Microsoft Clipart Gallery**.



3. Select the picture.
4. Next select **Format picture** > **Recolor** > **Black and white** – your image will be reduced to black and white. In my example the image is a little flat, having lost some its highlights (see round the tyres, in particular).



5. Trace off the image onto whatever material you are using for your stencilling. (In the example I have used freezer paper).

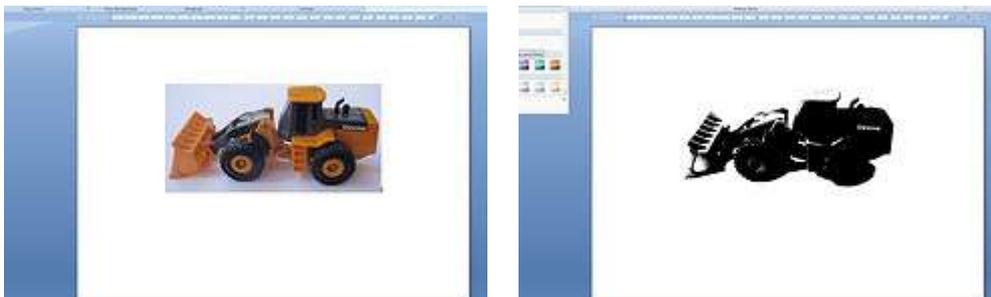
As you trace, you may like to smooth out the image, dispensing with smaller pieces of detail. You can also do a little bit of re-drawing to add bridges to islands (a stand-alone, floating piece of stencil). A bridge will keep an island attached to the main stencil and make it less fiddly to work with.



6. Cut out the stencil



**Note:** As mentioned earlier, the quick method will not work so well on some images. Here is an example below. The digger has essentially become an indistinguishable blob when flattened to black and white. To preserve detail we really need to adjust the image using Microsoft Word's Brightness (*adding more white or black*) and Contrast (*changing the difference between lightest and darkest areas*) features.



## Method 2: Adjusting Contrast and Brightness

1. Start **Microsoft Word** and create a new document
2. Insert the image that you wish to use. In my example I have used a picture of a toy digger that I photographed.
3. Select the picture.
4. Next select Format **picture** > **Contrast**.
5. Increase the **Contrast** to 100%.

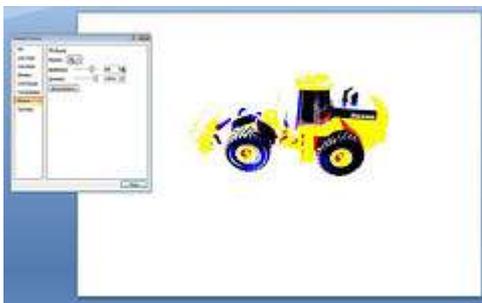
In my example, you can see that this reduced my image to just three colours - red, yellow and black.



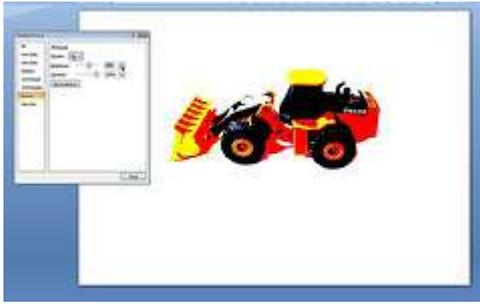
6. Again, select the picture.
7. Select Format **picture** > **Brightness**.

You will need to make an adjustment by eye, based on your image. I don't have an exact science for doing this, but can show you what happens if you increase or decrease the brightness too radically.

If the brightness is increased too much, I found a lot of the image disappeared (see *the following image*).



Likewise when the brightness was too low, a lot of detail was lost (*and again, see the following image*).



I thought that I what finally came up with (*below*) probably gave a suitable level of definition to the stencil. This was an increase in brightness of about 40%.



### Converting the image to greyscale

If you would like to convert your image from colour to greyscale, I have a word of warning ... based on experience. Even though you are making visible changes to the image throughout the last set of instructions ... *every* detail about the underlying graphic remains intact. (You may notice in your travels that there is a *Reset picture* option you can select). Microsoft Word applies many of its image editing features to the underlying graphic and not to alterations you have made. For example: after altering the brightness and contrast, I thought I'd change the image from colour to grey scale. Whoosh! All my work gone. Grey scale was applied to the original photo.

To get around this you can do a little hack workaround like this. Copy the altered image from Microsoft Word into something simple like the Paint accessory that comes with Windows. Then copy it again and paste it back into Microsoft Word. Et voila! You can now continue making changes, like I have done below.



*Happy stencilling!*