

The least expensive way to buy 35-millimeter film is in **bulk**—long rolls that can be loaded by hand into empty film cassettes. The following are needed for bulk loading:

**bulk film**  
**daylight bulk-film loader**  
**reusable film cassettes**  
**scissors**  
**tape**

*Bulk film.* Most commonly used 35-millimeter films can be purchased in varying bulk lengths, commonly 27½', 50', and 100' rolls. One hundred feet of film is equal to approximately 20 rolls of 36-exposure film, and costs considerably less than the same quantity of packaged film. The longer the bulk-film length, the greater the savings.

*Daylight bulk loader.* This is a light-tight container that allows bulk film to be loaded safely into empty 35-millimeter cassettes in room light. Several models are available, but all serve the same function.

*Reusable cassettes.* These cassettes look like the kind in which packaged film is sold, and are available from any good camera shop. They consist of a spool within a metal shell with a felt-protected opening in the shell through which film travels. The ends of the cassette open up and close tight to allow the spool to be removed and film to be taped to it.

*Scissors.* A sharp pair of scissors is needed to cut film.

*Tape.* Masking tape is best for attaching the end of the bulk film to the empty spool, though other types of tape will also work.

Bulk loading has two main advantages. It is less expensive than packaged film, and, unlike packaged film, it allows for a wide choice of exposures per roll. Either a small number of exposures, say 5, or a large number, say 36, can be loaded into a cassette.

The biggest disadvantages of bulk loading are the dangers of scratched negatives (if the loader and the cassettes are not kept clean) and fogged film (if the loader is not closed tight or the cassette has a light leak). A single piece of dirt on the felt of the cassette can scratch an entire roll of film as it winds its way onto the spool, and a minor light leak can ruin an entire roll of film. Neither problem will be evident until the roll is processed.

To prevent these problems, be sure that the inside of the loader is clean before each roll of bulk film is loaded. Blowout dust from the felt of both the loader and the cassette with a rubber air blower or canned air. Throw out cassettes after they have been used four or five times (or if they are at all suspect) to guarantee that they have not picked up dirt or developed light leaks. When not in use, store the loader and the film cassettes in closed plastic bags to keep dust out. Keep checking to see that the loader and cassettes are closed tight to avoid accidental light leaks.

When properly done, bulk loading can provide important financial relief for 35-millimeter film users. Sloppily done, it can be the source of frustration, and result in scratched or fogged negatives.

The bulk-loading procedure varies with the model loader, so read the instructions carefully before proceeding. Here are some general guidelines:

1. *In total darkness, unwrap the packaging from the bulk roll and drop the film in its place in the daylight bulk loader.*
2. *Pull the end of the roll through the light trap in the loader, so that a few inches of the film stick out into the compartment where the cassette fits.*
3. *Close the bulk loader tightly and turn on the room light.*
4. *Take apart a reusable cassette, and tape the end of the bulk film to the spool.*
5. *Reassemble the cassette. The end of the film should stick out of the felt-protected opening.*
6. *Position the cassette in its compartment in the loader and close up the compartment.*
7. *Fit the knob on the loader into the end of the spool. Turn the knob and the spool will rotate, picking up and winding the film onto it. The number of times the knob turns determines the length of the film being loaded. This number varies depending on the model loader used; each model has a counter that indicates how many turns equals how many exposures.*
8. *Once the desired length of film has been loaded, remove the cassette from the loader, and cut off the end of the film into a curved shape to make a leader. Note that the beginning and the end of each roll of bulk film gets exposed to light during the loading process. Therefore, waste a couple of extra exposures at the beginning of the roll; start when the film counter on the camera indicates "3" instead of "1." And don't shoot a roll all the way to its end. If there are supposed to be 36 exposures on a roll, shoot only 34 frames to be safe.*