

Not everyone has access to a darkroom or wants to develop film or make prints. Fortunately, there are many processing labs that can do the job for you. What you gain is reasonably quick results with little effort. What you lose is the potential cost savings and the fun and satisfaction that darkroom work can provide. Even more, you lose the on-the-spot creative control and quality that comes with doing work for yourself. There are certainly labs capable of doing an excellent job with your film and prints, but it's unlikely they will care about your work as much as you do. One approach is to use a lab for relatively standard procedures, like processing film but make the prints yourself. This lets you take advantage of the convenience of a lab without relinquishing significant control for the final result.

If you decide to send work to a processing lab, there are some things you should know to help get the best results. There are basically two types of businesses: **consumer labs** and **professional labs**. Consumer labs and mass-market photo finishers, often known as **minilabs**, are plentiful and inexpensive. But they specialize in processing color film and making relatively small and affordable snapshot-size prints, in sizes such as 4" x 6" or 5" x 7" snapshots.

Consumer labs are often found on premises in camera stores, drugstores, and dedicated retail locations. There also are stores that take in film, but send it to one of several companies that offer affordable and convenient mail-order processing, or use an Internet service that provides prints from scans or digital camera files.

There are far fewer professional labs than consumer labs, but most towns and cities have at least one. They offer color and black-and-white processing, as well as a variety of specialized services, such as push processing and pull processing. Geared to professional photographers, these labs generally provide a much higher level of quality than consumer labs, and they charge accordingly.