

IS BIGGER ALWAYS BETTER?

UNDERSTANDING IMAGE SIZE, PRINT QUALITY, AND WHY “LESS” CAN STILL BE PLENTY.

Do I need to shoot at my camera's largest image size for yearbook printing?

1. The short answer

No — using a smaller image setting on your camera will not reduce the quality of your printed yearbook photos. Even top notch printing presses like our Heidelberg Speedmaster cannot reproduce the full pixel detail of today's high-megapixel cameras. Once your image exceeds a certain resolution, more pixels simply don't make the print look sharper — they only make files bigger and slower to upload or edit.

2. The numbers behind it

Yearbooks are printed at high-quality offset resolution, typically 300 DPI (dots per inch). That means you only need 300 pixels per inch of printed space for the image to appear perfectly sharp to the naked eye.

Print Area	Required Pixels (300 DPI)	Equivalent Megapixels
Full page for Size 9 book (9" × 12")	2700 × 3600 px	≈ 9.7 MP
Full spread (18" × 12")	5400 × 3600 px	≈ 19.4 MP
Half page (9" × 6")	2700 × 1800 px	≈ 4.9 MP
Quarter page (4.5" × 6")	1350 × 1800 px	≈ 2.4 MP

Even if you filled an entire double-page spread with one photo, a 20 MP image already exceeds what the press can reproduce. Anything larger is simply downsampled before printing.

3. What happens to higher-resolution files

When a 45 MP or 60 MP photo is placed in a layout, eDesign automatically scales and compresses it to the resolution appropriate for print. The printer's system further resamples the file to 300 DPI before making the plates. The extra data never makes it to paper — it's just excess overhead that slows uploads, page rendering, and proof generation.

4. Why smaller files are often better

- Faster performance — uploads, downloads, and previews happen much quicker.
- Easier editing — photo software runs smoother with smaller files.
- Storage efficiency — less space used in your yearbook project and on your camera cards.

5. How to set your camera wisely

For DSLRs or mirrorless cameras:

- Choose a “Medium” JPEG size (usually around 12–20 MP) or set RAW to “mRAW/sRAW” if available.
- Use the camera's highest quality compression setting (“Fine” or “Super Fine”).
- Always shoot in good light with proper exposure — lighting and focus matter far more than megapixels.

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6. A helpful rule of thumb

Aim for about 3000–5000 pixels on the longest side for yearbook photos. That covers everything from portraits to full-spread images with plenty of quality headroom.

7. The real difference-makers

For crisp, beautiful yearbook prints, the biggest factors are:

- Proper focus and shutter speed
- Good lighting and exposure
- Lens quality and cleanliness

8. The takeaway

Your camera's "Medium" setting is more than enough. A 20 MP file can fill an entire double-page spread at true print resolution. Anything higher simply gives you bigger files, not better books. By shooting smart, you'll save time and storage, speed up uploads and layout performance, and still achieve identical print sharpness on your yearbook pages.