# Large Format Film Holders

Robert Rose © 2015

Large Format film holders (4x5 or larger) might seem mysterious, but they are designed to code whether the holder is loaded, and whether the film is exposed or unexposed. Each photographer sets his or her own code, however, so you need to be consistent and tell people what your code is if you use an assistant. Here is my code; except for #1 it is not necessarily the only "right" way.

1. Loading the film. Of course you must do this part in the dark. The emulsion must face the camera lens, so you must load the film with the emulsion up. All film has notches in the upper right of the emulsion side, so when you load the film be sure that you can feel the notches on the upper right. The confusion here is that the "upper" edge of the film is at the "bottom" of the holder, e.g., the edge that has the flap and opposite to the edge that has the slide pull out. You may need to take an exposed sheet to practice with the lights on.

2. Loaded and unexposed — WHITE. Dark slides (all makes and ages) have a white (or silver, unpainted) side and a black (or painted) side. I place the WHITE side out to signify that there is unexposed film in the holder, and turn the catch over the end of the slide. There will be some bumps on the white side so that you can identify it in the dark.
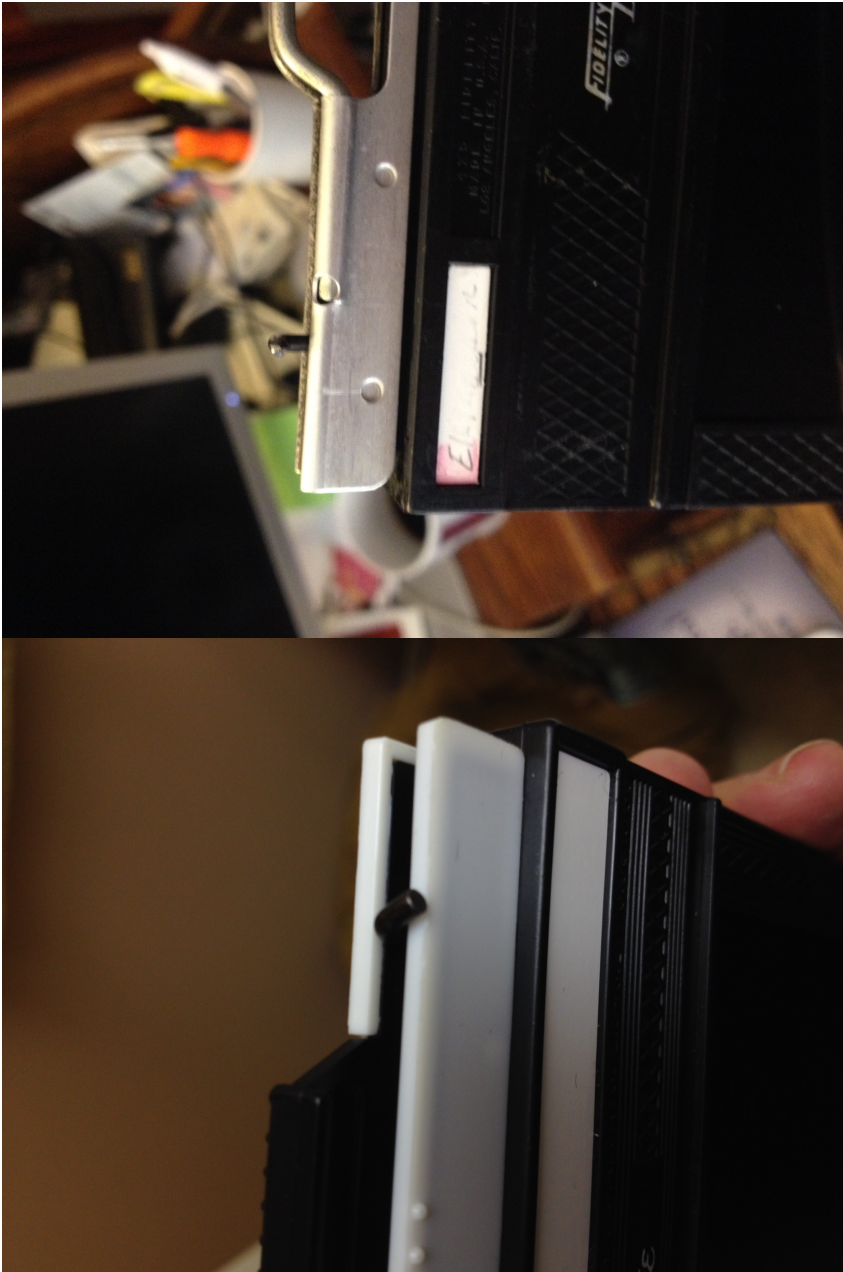
3. Place the ready to go film holder in a plastic bag with a film tag. One of you big problems is lint and dirt getting on the holder. You are ahead of the game if you place your holder in a quart size plastic bag, and a note as to the film loaded (if you need that). Any brand will do, so long as it is a top load and easy to get the holder in/out. See photo. Number the holders if you want to keep notes. You can notch the holder flaps if you think you will want to identify them later (if one has a light leak).
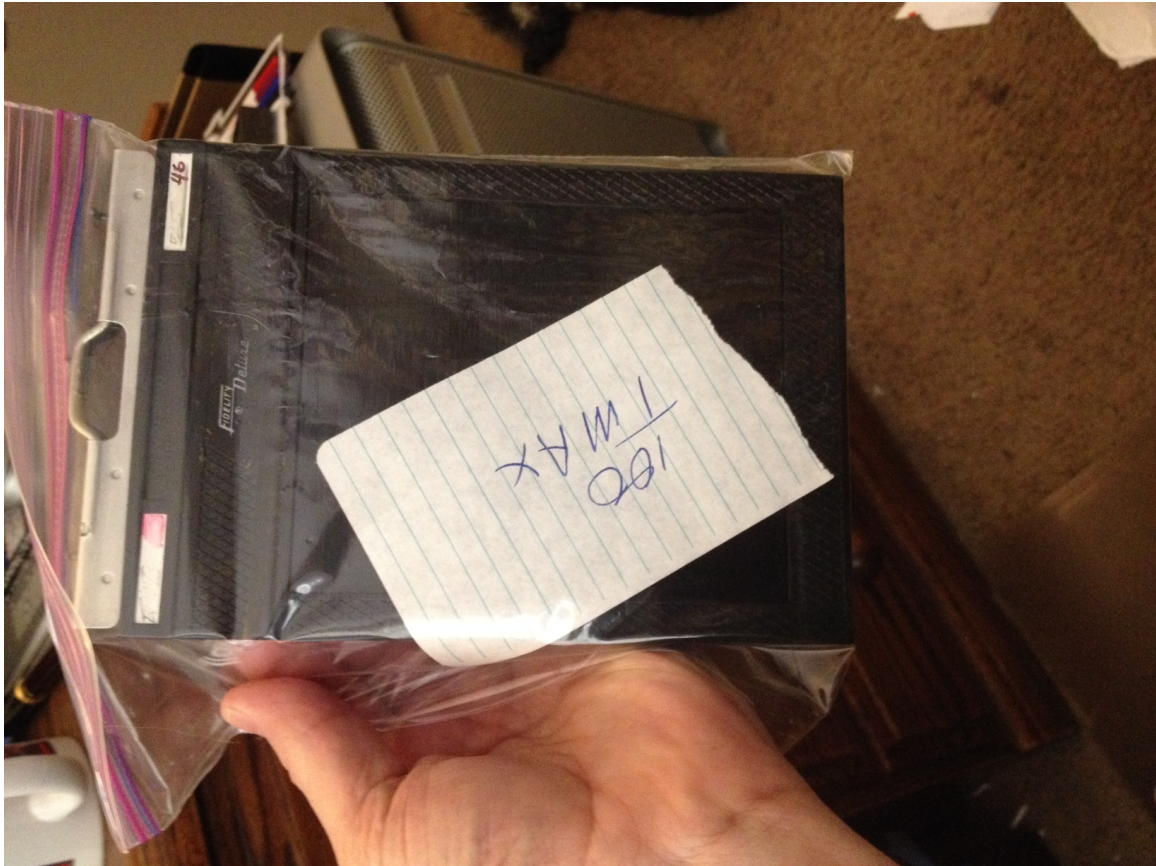
4. Open the Shutter (usually a large black tab), place it at largest aperture to FOCUS, calculate the exposure, set the aperture and speed, CLOSE THE SHUTTER, and then cock the shutter. I advised cocking the shutter last; just be consistent and be sure that you have closed the shutter. If you pull the dark slide while the shutter is open the film is exposed and worthless.

5. Insert the holder. Practice this at home first. It is really quite easy, but if you are rough you may knock over the camera or change the movements you just made.

6. Pull the dark slide. This next part is up to you. I have a dark cloth over the camera while I do this to prevent any light leaks. I pull the dark slide out, flip it over and reinsert it slightly.

7. Release the shutter. After the shutter takes the photo, push the dark slide in, and the black side of the dark slide shows. Turn the catch to indicate that there is film in the holder, and pull the holder out and rebag it.