A non-damaging way to frame a jigsaw puzzle

I make hand-cut wooden jigsaw puzzles. To see my work go to Scroll-Right.com or straight to my Etsy shop at Etsy.com/shop/ScrollRight

I know a lot of people like to frame their puzzles when they are done but puzzles like mine are meant to be kept and played for generations. So, in order to keep both of us happy I've done this little tutorial on a non-damaging way to frame a puzzle. I'm doing this for my 1/4” thick wooden puzzle but all you have to do for a regular puzzle is use shorter screws (if you so choose).

Basically we're going to sandwich the puzzle between two sheets of Plexiglas For a lot of you, that's probably about all the information you need but I'm going to go through the details anyway.

Here are your materials:

That's two sheets of plexi larger than your puzzle. Or you can one sheet and cut it down. There are many ways to cut plexi and I went with the easiest – I bought it already cut. Because of what they had handy I'm just doing an 8x10 frame to hold one of my 5x7 puzzles. This is just a tutorial, after all.

There's also a package of #6-32 machine screws, round head, 3/4” long. This package includes the nuts but not the washers so there's also a package of #6 flat washers. Both are far more than I need for this project, but they're useful and inexpensive.

On the right is one of the key items: the special drill bit you need for drilling Plexiglas. The tip of it is like a little arrowhead. I got a 1/8” bit because 6-32 screws are right at 1/8” diameter.

And, of course, you need your puzzle.

First, take your two sheets of Plexiglas and fasten them together. I used blue painter's tape but pretty much any tape will work. You want them held together so all of your holes will line up perfectly later.

If you look at the lower-left corner you'll see I set a nut in from the corner what looked like a nice distance. You can't see it, but I marked the center so I could measure. It turned out to be in right at 1/4” so I'll put all my holes along lines 1/4” from the edges.

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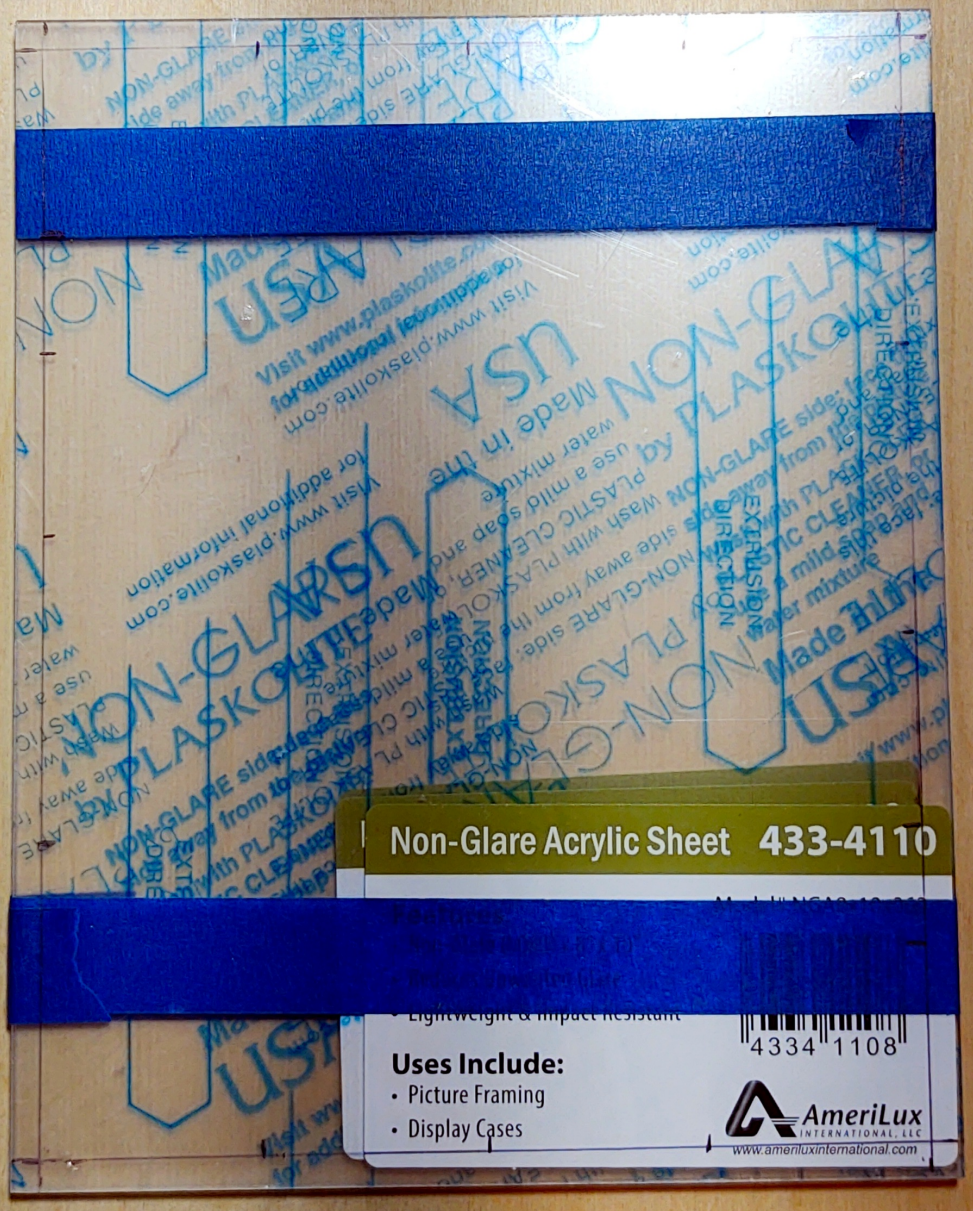

Next I've marked the lines at 1/4” in from the edge and marked where I'm going to drill the holes. My plan was to divide each side in half, and then half again. As you'll see later, I *almost* got it right.

When drilling the holes start slow – the drill bit will want to wander around on you. Keep an eye on the tip – I had a little blob of plexi stick to the tip after one hole. That was slightly annoying. Lay the Plexiglas on some sheets of cardboard – you want to have good support for the back of the bottom piece so it won't crack when you're drilling. I say use cardboard because it won't bother the tip of your special drill bit when you get through the plexi into it. Leave the drill running as you pull back – that helps clean up the hole a bit.

I drilled the holes in a very careful order – I started with the lower right corner hole, then the upper left, then the lower left and finally the upper right. After I drilled each corner hole I ran a screw through it to make **sure** the pieces stayed aligned. Then I drilled the center holes on the long side, the center holes on the short side, then the lower hole on one side, the upper hole on the other side – a standard alternation all the way around. Probably not necessary, but it seemed like a good idea at the time.

Once all the holes are drilled take the screws out, untape the panels and peel off the protective film – remember, it's on both sides. Clean up the holes and any stray bits of plexi. Peeling off the film puts a nice static charge on the Plexiglas so those bits (and every other bit of dust around) will be trying to be on your panels.

Center your puzzle on one panel, put the other panel over it and start putting in the screws. Once again I went with the four corners and then alternation all around.

Put a washer on the screw (looks better and spreads the force), put the screw through, put another washer and then the nut. Just spin it down hand tight.

I put the screws through with the heads to the front. Why? Two reasons: one, I think it looks better, and two, it lets the screws serve as stand offs if you hang your puzzle. One of the ways I've mounted my photographs is a 'floating' mount where you mount them to foam core with short pieces of 3/4” square wood on the back. The pictures just float above the wall, looking cool. By putting the screws at the back you get the same effect with the puzzle.

Now I used 3/4” screws. My puzzles are 1/4” thick, most Plexiglas is 1/8” thick so two sheets would be another 1/4” for a total of 1/2”. You need a bit more for the washers and nut so I went with 3/4”. My plexi turned out to be thinner so I have a bit more screw left over. It's ok.

Here's the framed puzzle from the front:

Yes, I made a slight measurement error on the long side, but at least I did it symmetrically. Even sitting like this you can see it's 'floating' in front of the background.

Here it is from the back:

I like that you can see the back. With wooden puzzles the back can be fun to look at. The laser cut folks will use the burned black lines from the process to do really cool scenes on the backs of their puzzles.

For hanging just run a cord/wire from the two outermost screws on the top side. This is a little one so I just set it on a stand I made earlier.

So there you have it, a non-damaging way to frame a jigsaw puzzle. If I want to put this puzzle back in the box all I have to do is undo a lot of screws.

For a larger puzzle you will, of course, have even more screws. How many is up to you but you need to make sure there's a reasonable amount of pressure on the puzzle so it won't slide. I had considered putting some foam window insulation around the puzzle but I didn't like the look of the stuff I bought so I didn't. You don't *need* it, but it would be another framing element if you so desired. Doesn't have to be insulation – you can put pretty much anything the same thickness as your puzzle around it. If what you're putting is soft I'd want it slightly thicker than the puzzle so it gets held in place.

If you need a puzzle, remember: Scroll-Right.com or Etsy.com/shop/ScrollRight