

**eBay® Photos
That Sell:
Taking Great Product
Shots for eBay
and Beyond**

*Dan Gookin
Robert Birnbach*

SYBEX®

eBay Photos That Sell

Taking Great Product Shots
for eBay and Beyond



TEAM LING - Live, Informative, Non-cost and Genuine !

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San Francisco • London

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Best regards,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Dan Brodnitz". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a long horizontal stroke extending from the end of the name.

DAN BRODNITZ
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About the Authors

This is Dan Gookin's 99th book on personal computers and technology. Dan's books, which include the international bestsellers *DOS for Dummies* and *PCs for Dummies*, have been translated into more than 30 languages and have sold more than 15 million copies. Visit his website at www.wambooli.com.

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“This book shows
you how, with a minimum
investment in time
and money, you can start
shooting better photographs
now.”



Introduction

To say that eBay is a craze is an understatement. It's a phenomenon. eBay, along with other online auctions and resale websites on the Internet, has opened up the retailing market to any entrepreneur with a computer, Internet connection, and something to sell. Eager buyers show up by the thousands every day. There are deals to be had and money to be made. Just about everyone is eager to be a part of that picture.

Setting up an online sale is simple. It's not really that technical; the steps involved don't require a Ph.D. in computer science or years of practice. The process is almost too easy, but making the sale often isn't. That's because the competition online is fierce. The buyer's attention span is short, so anything you can do that gives you that edge is valuable and necessary to help close the deal.

One of the most neglected yet vital parts of selling things online is the *photograph*. People desire a visual image of what they're buying. That picture can make or break a sale, so it's odd that sellers don't place that much emphasis on taking better photographs. In fact, the typical seller's photograph you find on eBay is such an afterthought that the image borders on comical. It's surprising that some people are able to sell anything, because they just can't take a good picture.

This book aims to eliminate the Bad eBay Photograph Syndrome. The idea is not to turn you into a professional photographer, but rather to give you some helpful hints, words of advice, and useful strategy for taking good, quality photographs—pictures that sell.

About This Book

You want to sell. Heck, you probably want to sell *more*. That's great! That's why you got this book. You know the value of a good photograph, and you want to take pictures of your stuff so that it looks much better than what the other guy offers—even when he's offering the same thing. Yes, that's entirely possible, and this book shows you how it's done.

What you don't want, however, is to waste time. You don't have the time to become a professional product photographer. You don't want to learn everything there is to know about a digital camera. You don't have time to waste on various studio techniques or money to waste buying expensive photographic equipment. You don't want to wade through all the countless options and features available in various photo-editing software. You just want to take a picture that sells.

Well, you've found your book.

Using the advice, knowledge, experience, and insight of a professional product photographer, this book gives you only the information you need to know to take the photograph that sells your stuff.

The cost involved is minimal. True, you might need a new or better digital camera, but that will pay for itself with all the sales you'll soon be making.

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This book shows you how, with a minimum investment in time and money, you can start shooting better photographs now. In just a few short pages, you'll immediately be able to recognize what you're doing wrong and take better pictures. The examples and step-by-step procedures tell you exactly what to do and how to create a picture that outshines the competition and leads to a sale made and profit gained.

What's Covered Here

This book shows you how to become a better photographer, with a specific concentration on taking product shots, or pictures of the things you plan to sell on the Internet.

Even though the concentration is on eBay, the techniques here work for any online auction or resale website. This information applies to all product shots, not only those that you'll use on eBay.

The book works sequentially, chapter by chapter. You'll discover how product shots work, why some shots don't, and how to improve your pictures and solve common problems.

You'll read here how to find material to help you set up the best possible shots. We cover two approaches to product photography: subjective and objective. You'll learn which is which, why one is more important than the other, and when to use either one.

This book tells you about digital photography and what's important to look for in a digital camera—specifically a camera that you'll use to take product shots. The camera is a money-making tool, and you need the best camera you can get to help you make money.

A great deal of information is provided on how to set up your product shots. You'll learn some tricks and secrets of the professionals. You'll find out how to best position the camera and your product. Plus, you'll learn valuable lighting techniques that help make the stuff you sell look natural and appealing.

There is basic information here on photo-editing software, specifically the latest version of Adobe's Photoshop Elements—a product that may have even come bundled with your digital camera. The emphasis is on only those parts of the photo-editing program that help you make the sale. This is not a photo-editing book, and no time is wasted on those parts of the program that have little to do with product photography.

Finally, you'll see page after page of examples. You'll see good shots. You'll see bad shots. You'll see step-by-step illustrations of ways to improve your photographs, along with instructions and suggestions, particularly for how to set up your shots. Plus, you'll see various ways to accomplish the same thing.

The bottom line here is the sale. You want to make an emotional connection with your buyer. The photograph is the ideal tool to meet that end. This book shows you exactly how that connection is made and how you can use a simple image to help you close the deal.

What You Won't Find Here

This is not a book on how to become a professional photographer. A special type of high-end photography is devoted to taking product shots. The experts in that field have invested years of study and practice, and they really know what they're doing.

If you want to spend money on your photographs, hire a professional to take them. Or when you have a product shot that you just can't get right, it's worth it to pay **TEAM LING - LIVE, INFORMATIVE, NON-COST AND GENUINE!**

a little more and get that professional eye and experience. But for most of the typical shots found on eBay, the method that this book proposes will be more than enough.

This book does not contain detailed tips and tricks that you can use in photo-editing programs. Although this book covers only Adobe Photoshop Elements, you'll find that many of the features documented here appear in other photo-editing programs. These programs may not use the same commands in the same way, but the features are commonly available.


This book doesn't have the space to illustrate an example for everything you could possibly sell on eBay. In fact, only two approaches are really necessary for product shots: objective and subjective. And despite the variety of objects for sale on the Internet, they all fall into the handful of categories presented in this book.

The only types of photographs you won't find specifically addressed here are pictures of cars and real estate. That's because car photography is a specialty all unto itself—really the topic for an entire book. Ditto for real estate photography. Yet for everything else, the approaches discussed in this book cover those items well.

Conventions

It is not necessary to have any specific digital camera or computer system to make this book work. The shots you'll see in this book were made with a variety of cameras that span the spectrum of cost and complexity.

The kind of computer you're using isn't really crucial. This book assumes that the computer's hardware is beefy enough to run standard photo-editing software, which is true for most computers sold in the past several years.

Instructions are provided for both PCs running Windows XP and Macintosh computers running OS X. When this book refers to Windows, it specifically means Windows XP, either the Home or Professional Edition. Where keyboard directions are given, the Windows keys Alt and Ctrl are specified. On the Macintosh, the  and Option keys are used.

Though this book specifically mentions Adobe's Photoshop Elements (version 3), you can use any photo-editing software. There are similar versions of Photoshop Elements for both the PC and the Mac.

Note: This text format identifies bonus information about the current subject or something you should pay particular attention to.



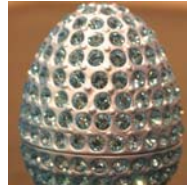
What Now?

You're probably itching to start improving your photography. That's great! This book was crafted to be read front to back. Though it's not necessary to read it in that manner, you'll benefit most if you read the chapters sequentially.

You can e-mail the authors at ebay@robertbirnbach.com and dgookin@wambool.com. The authors would love to hear feedback regarding this book, but they are not available to answer technical questions or for troubleshooting purposes.

Please enjoy this book!

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Selling Your Image

It's you versus the other guy, and the competition is stiff. Whether you're selling off great grandma's china, some extra stamps from your collection, or knickknacks from your own homegrown antique store, you want to take a picture that helps sell your stuff, a photograph that connects with the viewer and makes your item look better than the competition's.

Taking a photograph of an item you want to sell is vastly different from taking pictures at a birthday party. Yes, you can use the same camera. But creating an image that sells involves a deeper understanding of photography—and that's more than just knowing about all the knobs on your camera. It involves making a connection between the photograph and the buyer. That's the secret this chapter uncovers.

1

In This Chapter

- Professional and amateur photography
- The emotion involved with sales
- Good and bad picture examples
- Rules for taking the best photograph
- The results you want

Say “Cheese”

There is a whopping difference between taking a picture for your photo album and taking a picture of something you want to sell. If that’s news to you, great! (It should be news to most folks, given the clumsy “for sale” photographs you can easily find on eBay.) If it’s not news to you, at least you can recognize the professional edge, especially when you compare a good image with a bad one. Yet despite the obvious difference, few people can put their finger on exactly what makes one photo better than another.

Don’t mull it over! Here’s the answer: In a nutshell, the difference between the professionally taken photograph and the bazillions of pictures amateurs take every day is that the professional knows how to make a *connection* between the photograph and the person looking at the photograph. Everything else—the lighting, the technique, the approach—is all working toward the same thing: making the connection.

Aunt Flo versus the Professional

Photography has been around for more than 100 years. It’s neither a dark nor a mysterious art. There are professional photographers, but amateurs do most of the picture taking. That’s possible because taking a picture is one-click simple. But that miracle didn’t happen overnight.

Millions of research dollars have been spent over the years to find ways to make picture taking easier. Camera and film companies have invested in quick and idiot-proof ways to stick film in a camera. Research has been done on various methods of automatically focusing, automatic no-red-eye flash, and adjusting the exposure.

And I’m certain that psychologists have studied ways to help dear Aunt Flo know which end of the camera to look through. Such an investment made sense because people just love to take pictures. Amateurs are crazy about photography—quality be damned!



After all, a picture is a picture; the rough edges can be overlooked simply because photography in itself is just so darn amazing. Sure, James’s head is off the frame, but you can see Kelly just fine. Jean and Joan look a bit fuzzy in front of the Golden Gate Bridge, but see how Bob got in the shot as well (see Figure 1.1)? And God bless Grandma Eunice for believing that you had to take every picture before you could turn in a roll of film; otherwise, we wouldn’t have scrapbooked the “Grandpa Frank Reading the Paper in His Underwear” series.



Figure 1.1 Jean and Joan (and Bob) in San Francisco

The same applies to taking photos of bicycles, dinnerware, or clothing that you want to sell on eBay. Figure 1.2 is typical in this regard. Yes, that must be a beautiful Fabergé-like egg in the picture, but is it that one silver egg that’s really what’s for sale? What about all the other junk in the picture? And then look in the background: isn’t that the photographer reflected in the glass?

Contrast Figure 1.2 with Figure 1.3. It’s the same egg, but it’s a better shot. The focus is completely on the egg itself. You can see the detail. You notice the little golden legs in Figure 1.3, which are easy to overlook in Figure 1.2. The image in Figure 1.3 helps to sell the object with just a few simple tricks—time, thought, and care—nothing that this book cannot teach you.



Figure 1.2 What exactly is for sale here?



Figure 1.3 Same egg, better shot



Note: No one knows for certain where the phrase “Say ‘cheese’” originated, though it’s easy to assume that by saying that word, the mouth opens into a semi-smiling position. But what’s odd is that the phrase transcends cultures. In other lands, folks will pose for a picture and say “cheese” in their own native tongue—even when their word for cheese might not cause the mouth to open at all!

Admit it: there are some bad shots out there, taken by perfectly fine cameras, but imperfect photographers. What’s missing is the connection. The professional knows how to connect with the person who’s viewing the photograph. You may need more than 1000 words to describe something, but if you take the time to set up your photograph, the connection will be there. Even an amateur photographer recognizes it.

All Sales Are Emotional

When it comes time to take a photograph of something you want to sell, you need to pitch away all your amateur notions of photography. Even if you understand the mechanics—the focal length, shutter speed, aperture, and other technical camera terms—there is something more that needs to be put in the photograph.

When a photograph becomes a sales tool, you depart from the realm of photography and enter the high-pressured world of sales. Face it, you’re not trying to sell anything (or anyone) when you show a picture of your family sitting on a blanket having a picnic. But when you have something to sell—anything from a baseball card, to a rare coin, to an antique clock or an MP3 player—the photograph becomes a means to help you sell, to make money.

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In sales, you have competition, especially in the expanding world of online sales. On eBay, 100 other auctions can be going on at the same time, selling much the same thing. Immediately you know that your photograph must look better than the other seller's picture. Whether you're hawking the same thing as your competition or your stuff is miles better, your photograph must outshine that of the other person or you'll lose the sale—and the money. But there's even more to it than that.

All sales are *emotional*—on the part of the seller, but more important, on the part of the buyer. Emotion is present no matter what is being sold; even a basic necessity has emotion attached to its sale.

The person who buys a new car is after the emotion—the look and feel and excitement of the new car. Collectors may seem cold and calculating in their decisions, but they want to own and hold things they deem precious. New clothes make you look and feel good. Name a kid who doesn't get thrilled over a new toy. No matter the item, emotion is ever present in the buyer, who can be swayed to make a purchase by your ability to take the photo that makes the connection.

The best photographs make the emotional connection, bringing out the proper moods in the buyer. They think, "Wow! I could have that fantastic-looking lamp in my own house!" or "That train set is in mint condition and would be an asset to my collection." Or, "Wow, that coffee cup sure would sate my caffeine binge!" (See Figure 1.4.)



Figure 1.4
A well-done photograph makes a connection. What does this photograph say to you?

With the proper photograph conveying a feeling, the sales happen. But you must know how to take photographs that make the emotional connection or that evoke the kind of “I must have this” feeling in the buyer.

Rules for Taking the Best Picture

The photograph is such an important part of selling things that it’s curious (and often laughable) why so many people who try to sell things take such horrid pictures. Maybe they’re in a hurry. Maybe they really think that having neighbor Agnes’s hands holding up the flowerpot against the velvet wallpaper is the best way to sell such a thing. Or perhaps they don’t understand the emotional connection and the simple things this book describes to help make that connection and sell the product.

The rest of this book is devoted to helping you take the best possible pictures and sell your stuff. Before rushing off, creating your own photo studio, and snapping pictures, however, it’s best that you learn and understand a few basic rules.

Keep It Simple, Stupid

You’ve doubtless heard this rule before, and that’s because it’s a good rule that is too quickly forgotten: Keep it simple, stupid.

It’s too easy to overthink things. It’s too easy to become distracted with minutiae and get sidetracked. Don’t be afraid to try the easy way. Take a step back and consider easy alternatives when things become complex.

Consider Figure 1.5, in which someone is trying to sell a set of salt-and-pepper shakers. The shakers are set on a table, as they would be used in real life, but the shot is distracting. There are objects in the background, but not only that, the shot is taken with a wide-angle lens that distorts things. Although it is a true image of the shakers, it’s not the best image.



Figure 1.5
A quick shot taken without consideration of distractions

To improve things, you don't need much. Remember: keep it simple. In this case, a better shot in Figure 1.6 simply has the camera moved to a different angle, which still shows the same table as in Figure 1.5, but shows only the salt-and-pepper shakers.



Figure 1.6
A simple shot

Another improvement was made in Figure 1.6 as well: a sheet of white cardboard was set off to one side to help “bounce” light back onto the salt-and-pepper shakers. This cardboard wasn't any expensive material found only in a photography store. It was just a sheet of white cardboard, ideal for reflecting enough light to balance the sunlight coming in naturally from the window. No extra expense was involved, yet the shot looks like a million bucks over the original.

This book is packed with such examples of keeping it simple; they'll save you time, and they'll make you money.

Less Is More

In addition to keeping things simple, consider limiting the number of objects in each photograph. Think: *less is more*.

Remember the egg in Figure 1.2 with all the objects in the background? Yet Figure 1.3 showed all that's necessary in the shot.

In Figure 1.7, you see a set of wineglasses. Four of them are for sale, and four are shown. But do you really need to show all four? After all, the text description on eBay will say, “Set of wineglasses, quantity four” (or something like that). So the buyer knows the quantity and can probably assume that they're all the same glass. Why not just show one and show it best? Less is more!



Figure 1.7
Some wineglasses for sale.
Ho-hum.

In Figure 1.8, you see a wineglass for sale. It's probably one of a set, yet only the single glass is shown. In keeping with the previous rule, the setting is simple. An out-of-focus wine bottle in the background helps create the setting (covered in the next section). The camera is at a high angle, which helps you discern the true shape of the glass. And the glass is partially filled with wine, evoking a context for the buyer—literally inviting them to try a drink from this glass.



Figure 1.8
A single wineglass, but using
the less-is-more technique to
help sell the lot

Compare how Figure 1.7 makes you feel versus Figure 1.8. Keep in mind that all sales are emotional, so note which image works better on that level. Which one says to you, *that could be me sitting there sipping wine from that fine glass?*

You don't need to show a whole group of identical items you're selling. Instead, use one. *Less is more*. Just show one of the dozen lawn chairs, one place setting, one shot glass, one jewelry box.

Choose Your Approach

This book illustrates two different approaches to taking photographs of things you want to sell:

- The subjective approach
- The objective approach

The *subjective approach* places an object in an environment, showing the object in context. Some objects come across better this way, as opposed to being pictured alone. For example, the salt-and-pepper shakers of Figure 1.6 or the wineglass shown in Figure 1.8. Those items are placed in an environment. This helps create a better emotional connection with the buyer as opposed to showing the object alone against a solid background or otherwise out of context. In the subjective approach, it's easier for the viewer to imagine how they will use the object; you're setting up an example and selling your potential buyer a fantasy.

The *objective approach* shows an object placed in an artificial environment or out of context. A solid background or a minimal background is used that doesn't distract or pull the focus away from the object. This type of approach works best for objects that the buyer is familiar with, things they know about. So the context aspect of the subjective approach isn't really needed.

As an example, the egg shown in Figure 1.3 illustrates an objective approach. The background is present, but out of focus. That helps bring the egg forward and let the buyer examine the detail.

The objective approach is used with the Leica camera shown in Figure 1.9. This approach minimizes distractions and permits a potential buyer to concentrate on the object itself: it can be scrutinized, its details examined, and its worthiness judged. The objective approach appeals to people who know what they want and don't need the extra push that showing an object in context offers. It's more coolly logical than the subjective approach.



Figure 1.9
The objective approach helps the buyer scrutinize something they're familiar with.

Common to both approaches is the emotional connection with the buyer. Remember that emotion is involved with selling, and you're using the photograph to help push that emotion. With the subjective approach, the emotion is a fantasy image, selling the item in an imaginary context that the viewer can project themselves into. The emotions might be subtler with the objective approach, but they're still there; a collector needs to be sold the next item in their collection to satisfy whatever needs the collection gives them.

Choosing the right approach depends on many things, yet it's possible to use either approach in many circumstances. The same vase is shown objectively in Figure 1.10 and subjectively in Figure 1.11. Deciding which image is best to use depends on the subject matter, who you're trying to sell to, and your gut instinct. This book helps you decide which approach works best, how to set up and use those approaches, and how to take your photographs.



Figure 1.10 A vase shown in a subjective approach



Figure 1.11 The same vase shown in an objective approach

The images in Figures 1.10 and 1.11 were taken in the same location. Setting the vase on a sheet of white paper, which was bent upward, created the “infinite horizon” effect in Figure 1.11. Otherwise, it's the same vase in the same location. Remember: keep it simple, stupid.

Thoughtful Setup

Great care must be taken in creating the type of photograph you need, subjective or objective. *Setup* is involved, which is a must! The camera must be properly positioned, never handheld. Attention must be paid to the lighting. Technical issues must be dealt with. (Don't fret; it's all carefully explained in this book.)

Why bother? Because you want more than yet another amateur photograph! Compare the quick rush of the table photographed shown in Figure 1.12 with that in Figure 1.13. It's the same table in both figures.



Figure 1.12 A rush job doesn't properly showcase this fine table.



Figure 1.13 A better shot of the same table

In Figure 1.12, the camera angle is bad because the tabletop directly reflects the sunlight. Also the floor color tends to blend in with the table, detracting from the table's appearance. Sure, that may be the exact spot where the table sits in the seller's house, but because no attention was paid to the setup, the photograph is less than what it could be.

In Figure 1.13, it's the same table. In fact, the camera is even at the same angle. But the table was moved away from the window so that the bad reflection is gone. The table was also cleaned—which is an amazing thing to try and something many people often forget. Clean up the stuff you plan to sell!

In Figure 1.13, the new floor helps warm up the image, balancing the industrial gray of the table. A magazine placed beneath the table's glass top helps the buyer to connect with the image, showing a possible way of using the table. And finally, the door is open and objects are placed inside, again showing not only that there is a glass door in the table (which isn't obvious in Figure 1.12) but that the inside of the table can be used for storage.

The main difference between Figures 1.12 and 1.13 is simple: setup.

Figure 1.14 shows a popular MP3 player, the Apple iPod. The owner probably keeps his iPod in such a position and such a place, but without careful setup, you have an awful picture. When the iPod is lying flat, all dimension is lost. The wide

camera angle makes the thing look distorted. And what the hell is the screwdriver doing in the shot?

Figure 1.15 shows a more improved version of the iPod with just a modicum of setup and a few fancy camera tricks that this book later discloses. The difference between the images is not only in the setup; you can bet dollars to donuts that the iPod shown in Figure 1.15 sells before the one in Figure 1.14.



Figure 1.14 Another hasty setup leads to an awful picture.



Figure 1.15 Same iPod, better setup

Remember, the photograph is a tool to help you make the sale, not a rushed obligation. Is that what you figure the photographer in Figure 1.16 had in mind? The sad thing here is that the photo might just work, but with a little extra care and really no extra expense, so much more can be done.

Consider Figure 1.17, which, like Figure 1.16, is attempting to sell a hat. In this case, a wee bit of devotion was necessary to properly take the shot. First, the hats are just sitting on regular hat stands—something that anyone who's into hats would have. The stands are sitting on a regular wooden table. Finally, a roll of brown shipping paper is draped in the background, covering up whatever is behind the table. The light is natural and coming through a window. Maybe 10 or 15 minutes was taken to set up this shot, yet it looks so much better than the haphazard shot in Figure 1.16.



Figure 1.16
Oh look: a hat.



Figure 1.17
Some minor attention to setup
creates a wonderful display.

Do It Right the First Time

Thanks to the miracle of today's photo-editing software, you can fix just about any flaw in any photograph. That's nice, but it's distracting if you're shooting and thinking, "Well, I can always fix it later." It's better to get the image right in the camera the first time than leaning too heavily on photo-editing software. You can still use the software

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to fix mistakes, but it's better to spend that 5 extra minutes setting up the best shot in the first place than to spend 50 minutes fumbling around in a photo-editing program.

Believe it or not, that's a perfume bottle in Figure 1.18. Like many perfume bottles, it's of an unusual shape. It's also shiny and reflects light. But more important, like lots of things people sell on eBay, it's *black*. Black shiny objects are difficult to photograph, especially when (as in Figure 1.18) the background is mostly black as well.

Yes, the photograph in Figure 1.18 can be spiffed up nicely using photo-editing software. But why spend a few hours in front of your computer when a few simple, less-is-more, objective rules can be applied to the object instead? The result is the photo in Figure 1.19.



Figure 1.18 What the hell is that?



Figure 1.19 Some minor attention to setup creates a wonderful display.

First, the perfume bottle was cleaned. Reflections on a shiny black object are good, but not when they reflect dirt and crud—and especially fingerprints. (No one wants to believe that their new purchase has been overly manhandled.)

Second, the shiny black object was placed on a sheet of white plastic, though any white material could work. The purpose here is twofold: to contrast with the black object and help it stand out, and to aid in the reflections on the black object. You can see the edge of the white material reflected in the black object, which also helps define the object's shape.

Finally, natural light coming through a window is allowed to reflect on the object, helping to define the surface and expose the object's dimensions. The reflection is *good*.

Yes, all the differences between Figures 1.18 and 1.19 could have been achieved in the digital darkroom. But a little setup and attention to detail—and no expense—led to an image that needs little, if any, fixing in a photo-editing program.

In Figure 1.20, you see a lunch box for sale. The photographer has done a bit of setup here, positioning the lunch box in the light and angling it so that the dimensions are properly shown. It would be super easy to eliminate those ugly shadows in a photo-editing program, but just a few more minutes of setup can save lots of time at the computer.



Figure 1.20
The ugly shadows here can be removed in a photo-editing program with time and care.

Figure 1.21 fixes the ugly shadow problem by diffusing the light source. The solution: draping a shower curtain liner over the window. Not only are the shadows gone, but the light looks more natural and helps fill in around the lunch box, bringing in details on the side. Two minutes of clothespinning a shower curtain to a window saved about 40 minutes of painstaking detailed mouse work at the computer.



Figure 1.21
Diffusing the light source cures the ugly shadow problem.

Don't misunderstand this rule to mean that taking the proper picture is difficult! It really isn't. The extra few minutes you spend developing the shot makes a big difference in the end result. (And that's what you want, right?)

This rule doesn't imply that photo editors aren't important. Even the pros use photo editors because some things just cannot be done in a camera, some things are just easier to do later, and some mistakes would take too much time to fix otherwise.

For example, in Figure 1.21, you might notice an odd little square shadow behind the lunch box. In fact, you might not have even noticed the shadow at all when you snapped the picture. Such a thing would take a while to puzzle over and try to fix when the shot was taken, but it's easy to fix in a photo-editing program.

In Figure 1.22, the square shadow is merely blurred away. It's not eliminated (though it could have been). Instead, a filter was applied that blurred the edges and made the shadow less noticeable—and distracting.



Figure 1.22 Using photo-editing software to fix one, final obnoxious shadow

This book explains (in Chapter 4) when and how to use your photo-editing software, without having to rely too heavily on it.

The Results

When you do everything right, you make that emotional connection, and your photograph leads to a sale. That's the result you want.

The good news is that anything can be photographed well. There is no object, item, or trinket that defies the camera and stubbornly refuses to take a good picture. Everything can be fixed. With only a little effort and a few dollars in equipment (perhaps even stuff you already have around your house), it's possible to take a quality picture of things that people will want to buy.



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Your Own Photo Studio

Taking professional-quality photos to sell your stuff means you'll be spending a little more time setting up the scene and the camera than you're used to. But don't go nuts! Don't march off to the camera store and pick up \$200 worth of equipment. The fancy equipment, stands, and those lights that look like umbrellas aren't the key to taking good pictures. If you recall from Chapter 1, keep it simple.

Yes, it helps to set up your own little photo studio, but you don't need to go hog-wild nuts and spend a lot of money to make that studio happen. You don't even need to sacrifice the sewing room or part of the garage to get things done. This chapter shows you what you need, how to get it without spending a lot, and how to use things found around your house to set up an efficient and productive photo studio.

2

In This Chapter

How to set up your own photo studio
Things to get for your studio
Creative studio tricks

A Place for Your Studio

You don't really need a permanent photo studio location. In fact, for taking subjective photos, setting up a context using things found around your home is probably best. But even for objective photographs, a permanent studio or location isn't necessary.

It's best to have a defined space for your photographic effort when you're taking the pictures. You can use anything from the kitchen table, to a card table, to the workbench out in the garage. When you're done, you can put away your photo equipment and return the space to its previous use.



Note: There is no need to keep your photo studio up and ready all the time, that is, unless you're taking pictures all the time.

Stuff to Get

Suppose that you're a rich, eccentric weirdo. You're loaded with cash. But you have a huge bowling ball collection from when you closed all the bowling alleys in New Jersey and replaced them with various forms of adult entertainment. You want to sell those bowling balls on eBay and reap a modest profit. You're even willing to set up your own photo studio with professional equipment because, well, you have the money. So what exactly do you need?

Ha! You'll never find out. That's because it just isn't worth the time to describe esoteric photo studio equipment here. If you're gullible, march off to the camera store, and they'll sell you the works. But you're probably the type who's in this to make money and not spend it. Therefore, here's the short list of things you'll need to help create your photo studio:

- A shower curtain liner
- Cheap lamps
- Clothespins and clamps
- Drawing paper
- White foam core
- A can of air
- A ladder

Surprised? Nothing fancy is really needed. Odds are you can find most of these things around your house if you look hard enough.



Note: One item not listed but absolutely essential is a tripod. It's best to think of the tripod as an integral part of your camera. Therefore, the tripod is covered in Chapter 3, which is about your digital camera.

You may not need all these, and there's no point in rushing out to buy everything now. The sections that follow describe in detail what these items are, what they're used for, and where to find them cheap. Wait until you start taking pictures later in this book before you get any of them.

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The Miraculous Shower Curtain Liner

While the shower curtain is for show, it's the liner that does all the work. It keeps the water *inside* the tub and not all over the floor. Plus, it serves another purpose useful for your photo studio: the shower curtain liner obscures light. It turns your stark naked R-rated self into a fuzzy G-rated blur. It's that miraculous light-diffusing quality that comes in handy for your photographs as well.

For about \$5 or so, you can buy a shower curtain liner. Don't get one that's fully transparent or totally opaque. Instead, find a frosted shower curtain liner and cut it into smaller pieces. You can then suspend those pieces in front of your light source to diffuse the light and eliminate ugly harsh shadows. The idea is to re-create the type of light you'd find on an overcast day. To a professional photographer, that is the best light to shoot in. They call it *God's softbox*. (A *softbox* is a professional lighting device that retails between \$200 and \$700.)

On an overcast day, the light falls evenly all around a subject. Shadows are limited to where an object touches the ground, and their outlines are fuzzy. That's the kind of light you want to use when you take pictures of something you want to sell. A small swatch of a shower curtain liner hanging over a lamp reproduces such light nicely.

Compare the images in Figures 2.1 and 2.2. It's the same camera setup and the same light source in each image. But in Figure 2.2, a small square cut from a shower curtain liner was placed in front of the light source. Note how the image in Figure 2.2 opens up. It lacks the dark, contrasty nature of Figure 2.1. (A second light source, also diffused, would be necessary to help cancel out the remaining shadows.)



Figure 2.1
An unfiltered, direct light



Figure 2.2
Diffused direct light, using
the shower curtain liner

Figure 2.3 shows an example of how such a light source can be set up. Notice that the shower curtain liner is some distance from the light. This is necessary to keep the material from melting and stinking up the place.



Figure 2.3
Setting up a shower curtain diffuser



Note: If you have an overcast day, take advantage of it! Especially if you're taking pictures of things outside, waiting for an overcast day can be to your advantage. This works even if you're shooting images inside; use the light from a window to help illuminate your subject matter. Overcast day = good light. When the light you're using is still too harsh, consider doubling the amount of shower curtain diffuser. Two layers of diffuser can *really* spread that light around, but note that it also diminishes the total light available.

Cheap, Old, Ugly Lamps

There is no point in buying expensive lamps or—heaven forbid!—theatrical lighting for your photo studio. Instead, go to any hardware store and pick up the type of lamp shown in Figure 2.4. Get about three or four of them to cover all the bases. Also get a pack of 100-watt lightbulbs to populate the lamps.

Note: Get white or frosted lightbulbs; do not get clear bulbs.



Figure 2.4
A good lamp for your photo studio

Honestly, nearly any type of lamp works, not specifically the type shown in Figure 2.4. The advantage of the type of lamp shown is that it has its own clamp, which makes it easy to arrange and affix the lamp so that its position stays constant throughout your photo shoot.

Note: Don't use household lamps or desk lamps for your photo studio. The light from such lamps is difficult to throw in one direction and even harder to diffuse. Also, some desk lamps are limited to using only low-wattage bulbs that cannot throw light effectively beyond two or three feet.



One type of light available in the camera store (though at a premium) is the *photoflood*. These are standard-sized lightbulbs but which have a favorable color temperature (equal to daylight) and are very bright. If you have such a bulb, use it! But there is really no need to go out of your way or pay the extra money for such a thing.

Clothespins and Clamps

A professional photographer will tell you that there's nothing handier than the standard clothespin—the springy kind. They even have a photographer's stock number for it: C47. So if you want to sound like a pro, don't call it a clothespin; it's a C47.

Clothespins are perfect as tiny, temporary clamps, holding things in position. For example, they can help affix a background to a paint can or phone book. Clothespins can help keep items such as greeting cards open. And you can use them to help prop things up (covered later in this chapter). Anywhere you need an extra set of fingers to hold something, clothespins work in a pinch.

Another handy trick is to chain clothespins together to build structures. Clothespins can be used to help keep shower curtain material away from a hot light, as shown in Figure 2.5. Also note that Figure 2.5 shows how clothespins can be chained together.



Figure 2.5
Clothespins make great clamps,
and they're inexpensive.



Note: If you're photographing small objects, consider using clothespins to hang those items up on a clothesline for a humorous effect.

Another handy item to have around are clamps, such as the A-shaped wood clamps available at any hardware store. You can use these when you really need to hold something down or grip an item into place. And you can also use them to help prop up heavier backgrounds or hold down lamps in positions where the lamp's clamp just won't do.

Drawing Paper

Don't worry; this book isn't regressing to drawing images. No, it's just that you can use drawing paper to help set your photograph's scene. Specifically, drawing paper helps provide a setting for your image—something more interesting than a Formica tabletop, for example.

You can use black paper and white paper, and if you look hard in the hobby stores, you'll find specialty paper, textured paper, and all sorts of fun and interesting papers. The only limitation is the size; note that sometimes you'll have to find large format paper in an office supply or hardware store.

As an example, Figure 2.6 shows a bracelet sitting atop some fancy paper, which makes the image more interesting than the same shot against a plain background (see Figure 2.7). It's really an aesthetic choice.



Figure 2.6
Fancy paper helps set off
this bracelet.

Patterned paper is okay, but don't use paper that overpowers your image. For example, a black object on black or dark paper would be dumb in that it makes the image difficult to see.



Figure 2.7
A bracelet against a bad
background

Foam Core Board

Foam core is a special type of art material with paper on both sides and a thin layer of foam in the middle. It's usually about ¼-inch thick and comes in sizes from a sheet of paper on up to several feet square. It's normally used as mounting material or for constructing models. For your purposes, foam core will be a light source.

Just as the moon reflects the sun's light, you can use a sheet of white foam core to reflect light from your main light source. This helps fill in the shadows, and it does so in a natural way without overpowering the image as a second lamp might do.

Figure 2.8 shows the same object photographed in Figures 2.1 and 2.2. In this evolution, a piece of white foam core was situated just to the right of the image (off camera). That's enough to bounce the primary light source back onto the object and help fix the shadows.



Figure 2.8
Foam core helps reflect light and fill in shadows.

The light-bouncing material doesn't necessarily need to be a piece of foam core; any white material will serve well to bounce light. But foam core is rigid, lightweight, tough, and cheap—which is why it's recommended.

Another way to use foam core is as a *dark source*. For example, you can position a piece of black foam core so that it eliminates an ugly reflection or light bounce on an object. (See Chapter 6 for some examples.)

A Can of Air

Clean things before you shoot them! Who wants to buy glassware with smears or fingerprints on it?

The objects you shoot should be as clean as they can possibly be. This is a fine example of saving time by taking proper care in setting up your image; although it's possible to remove fingerprints with photo-editing software, it's a pain. Just clean your stuff *before* you shoot it.

In some cases, rather than rub something with a damp cloth, which tends to smudge, consider getting the dust off by using a can of compressed air. It's just a handy thing to keep around. You can get canned air at any office supply store.

Note: Obviously, old or distressed items need to retain that old and distressed look. Don't bother cleaning up the antiques if that antique look is supposed to be there.



A Ladder

As any kid will tell you, ladders are for climbing. Occasionally, you might want to take a shot from a higher altitude than your human body can reach. As an example, consider Figure 2.9. The object being sold is a bicycle. It's a glorious, overcast day, so the shadows aren't a problem. But what is a problem is the busy background. Although you could remove that with time and care in a photo-editing program, a better solution is to just whip out a handy ladder.



Figure 2.9
Nice bike. Ugly background.

In Figure 2.10, you see the same bike as in Figure 2.9, in the same position on the same day no less. But because the shot angle is elevated, the background noise is reduced. That way the buyer can concentrate on the bike. Using a ladder is a great way to capture larger objects outside.



Figure 2.10
By stepping up on a ladder, you can easily isolate the bike.

The ladder is also an excellent holder for things such as lamps and lights.

The alternative to the ladder is to buy an expensive stand-and-clamp system. But why do that when you can just clamp or affix one of your cheap ugly lamps to a handy ladder, which is something most people have?

Alternatives to using a ladder to help you hold lamps include anything you have in your house that's freestanding and stable. For example, a torchiere lamp, while ill-suited to this type of photography, can be used as a stand to hold a lamp; just clamp the lamp to the torchiere's base. You can also use chairs, barstools, or anything else that's stable and steady.



Note: Remember to use items you find around your house! Be clever! Think outside the box!

Helpful Studio Techniques

A magician can work his magic only when the audience obeys. For example, most magic is performed for an audience that sits in front of the magician in a given space. People aren't allowed to get up and wander around the stage with the magician or even sit behind him. If you did, you might see how the tricks are done, and there wouldn't be any magic. In fact, the whole show would appear rather dumb.

Like a good magician, a photographer shows you only what you want to see. The results are amazing and impressive. But that's because the camera captures only what the photographer-magician wants you to see. If you were able to get up and look at the same picture from another angle, you would see the tricks and the secrets.

The following sections describe some common tricks used in photography. These are behind-the-scenes things and stuff you'll need to know when you want to get that perfect shot. It's nothing magic, but there is a certain sense of "aha!" when you discover some of the sneaky ways photographers do magic for the camera.

Creating an Infinite Horizon

For creating the objective look, an infinite horizon is a must. That's the type of shot in which the object appears to exist in a universe all to itself. The surface on which the object sits just goes on forever; there is no fold, crease, or join where that surface meets the sky. This technique allows for full concentration on the object with no other distractions.

You don't need a lot of equipment or fancy footwork to make an infinite horizon. Figure 2.11 illustrates how an infinite horizon is set up using a sheet of drawing paper. Lay down the sheet, curving it up at the back. In Figure 2.11, a heavy book helps prop up the paper. (Also notice how an A-shaped clamp holds down the other end.) There can be no crease or line. Presto: you have an inexpensive infinite horizon.



Figure 2.11
Setting up an infinite
horizon

Note: Professional photographers use something called *seamless paper* that is hung from a *seamless stand*. But regular drawing paper works just as well.



Infinite horizons are great for taking objective photos of small- to medium-sized objects, such as the butter dish shown in Figure 2.11. Larger objects present more of a problem, however, as do objects that cannot be readily moved. For them, another technique is to use your photo-editing software to eliminate the background, essentially reducing the image to the object only. This technique is covered in Chapter 4.

You need to remember two things when creating an infinite horizon. First, ensure that there are no wrinkles or creases in the paper. Creases and dirt spoil the effect. And second, the paper must be large enough to hold the object you're photographing. Otherwise, you'll need to use your photo-editing software to remove the background.

Propping Things Up

Some items just look better when they are standing up. That's because people prefer to view items head on. For example, a book might naturally lie on a tabletop, but if you take a picture that way, the book looks distorted, as shown in Figure 2.12. It also looks flat and generally uninteresting.

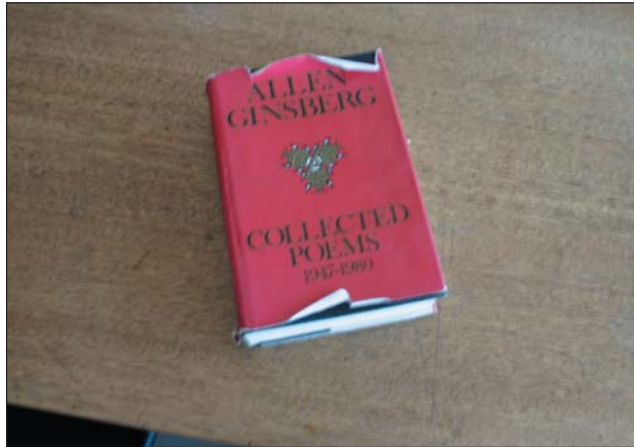


Figure 2.12
A book that hasn't been propped up

People want to see things standing up, despite how nature prefers to arrange things. Because of this, you must be sneaky—like a magician—and magically prop things up but without being obvious. (That means no leaning things up against a wall or box.)

In Figure 2.13, you see a side view of an infinite horizon setup photographing two DVDs. To help keep one DVD propped up, a saltshaker is used. The other DVD is assisted by a water glass. From the front, both DVDs look freestanding. Indeed, it would appear as though the photographer carefully balanced the DVDs and then rushed back to take the shot. But in actuality, the saltshaker and water glass are there in Figure 2.14; you just can't see them.



Figure 2.13
Objects that normally fall over
are being propped up.

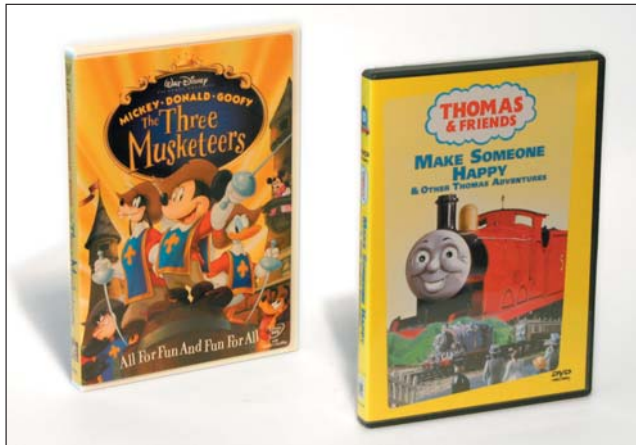


Figure 2.14
The buyer has no clue that these
DVDs are being assisted behind
the scenes.

The rule about propping stuff up is simple: use whatever works and doesn't peek out from around or behind the item being photographed. You can use anything handy or heavy—clothespins, tape, blocks of wood, what have you. As long as the camera doesn't see what's propping up the object, it will appear in the photograph to be standing by itself.



Note: Avoid using your hands to prop things up! Some of the most comical images on eBay are of regular folks and their hands holding something up. Invariably the image's focus becomes the human hands and not the object being photographed. Besides, many people don't like the idea of having someone handle the object they want to buy.

Lighting Techniques

Lighting is essential to photography, so just because it's listed last in this chapter doesn't make it the least of your techniques.

The idea behind lighting an object is to emulate the sun on an overcast day. The light you use, whether from Our Mr. Sun himself or from a cheap lamp, should illuminate your subject as naturally as possible. In fact, sometimes using the sun that's available to you is one of the best ways to light an object.

For example, the object in Figure 2.15 is lit with natural sunlight coming in through a window. That's it! No fancy lights. And definitely no flash.



Figure 2.15
Light coming from a window lit this image.

As covered earlier in this chapter, when an overcast day isn't available, regular sunlight through a window works well—providing that you diffuse that light with a shower curtain liner. Just tape or clamp the shower curtain liner over the window to create your overcast day.

When the sun isn't cooperating at all, bring out your lamps, again covered with the shower curtain diffuser as illustrated earlier in this chapter. That helps break up the direct light and eliminate a number of the shadows.

The final light source available to you is the white card, such as the foam core material mentioned earlier in this chapter. You can bounce light whether it comes from a lamp or from the sun.

Place the white card on the opposite side of the object, facing the light source. Like the light source, keep the white card out of the frame; move it back if you can see it in the image.

As an example, in Figure 2.16 (which you saw back in Figure 2.2), the direct light is coming from a lamp to the left of the object. The white card is then placed on the right, as illustrated in Figure 2.17.



Figure 2.16
In this shot, the light is coming from a lamp on the left.

Note: The light bounced off the white card won't be as dominant as the original light source, so it's ideal to fill in the shadows and help balance the image. The result is something that looks utterly natural to the human eye.



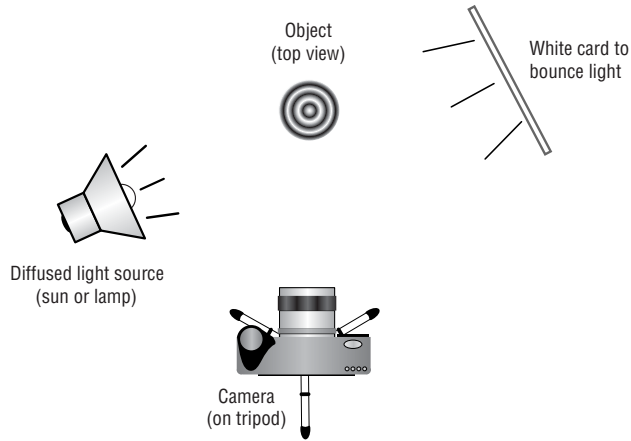


Figure 2.17
Placing the white card to bounce light

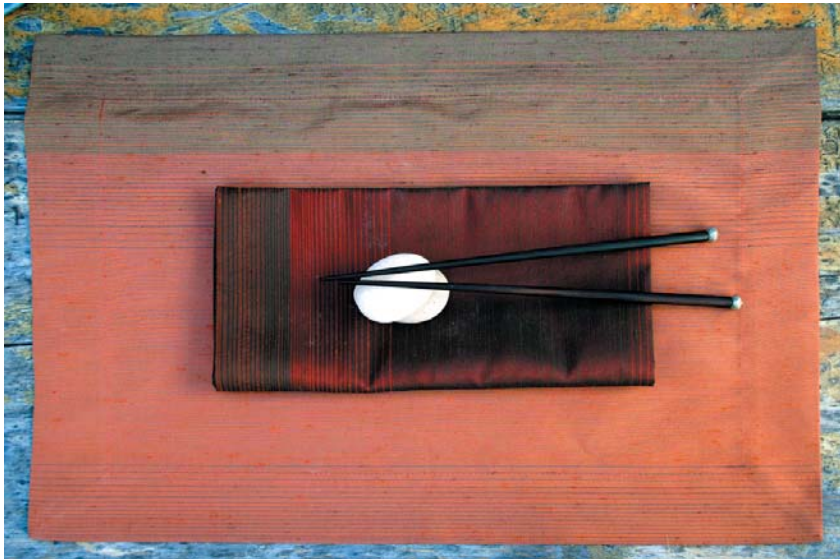
Finally, keep in mind that lighting can be mobile. Set up the object. Set up the camera to frame the image. Then work out the shadows and reflections by moving the lights.

For example, in Figure 2.18, the lights had to be moved and rearranged several times to fully eliminate all the odd reflections from the plastic cover on the action figure. But it was the lights that were moved, not the object or the camera.



Figure 2.18
Eliminating reflections can take time.

Eventually the best position for the lights was found and the picture taken. The lesson here is that you need to remember that lights can be moved and rearranged. But keep the camera and the object stable. You'll avoid a lot of frustration by following that simple rule.



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Basic Photography

Cameras are sold by boasts of their creative simplicity: automatic focus, automatic exposure, automatic just-about-everything. The camera may be “smart,” but it’s not clairvoyant; to get the results that sell, you occasionally need to override the camera’s wizardry and exert a little hocus-pocus of your own.

This chapter covers some basic photographic concepts, information you’ll rely on later when you learn how to set up those perfect product shots that sell. It all starts with choosing the best camera. Then you’ll learn what all those knobs and buttons do and how to use them to conjure the exact picture you want.

3

In This Chapter

Selecting a digital camera

Don’t forget a tripod

Choosing the focus

Understanding aperture and shutter speed

Controlling depth of field

Setting up the camera

Setting image resolution

Lighting the subject

Choosing a Digital Camera

Forget film. Digital is where it's at when it comes to state-of-the-art photography. The list of things you can do on film that you can't do digitally is dwindling to the point of obscurity. So right away, know that you need a digital camera. It's part of the future. It's a must.

Unlike trying to create your own economical photo studio (see Chapter 2), there is no point in scrimping on what you're going to pay for your digital camera. You're going to be using that camera to *make money*. So consider it an investment, one that will pay for itself over time.

Based on the features recommended in the next few sections, you can expect to pay anywhere from \$300 on up to \$1200 for your digital camera—which is curiously similar to the same price you'd pay for a comparable quality SLR camera a few years back.

Don't go hog wild! There is no point in buying a high-priced, professional digital camera or spending too much money here. Buy your camera based on the features listed in this chapter. Avoid the temptation to dive into some top-of-the-line model unless you plan to do more professional work with your digital camera. But on the other hand, you don't want to shortchange yourself. After all, your competition is buying a good digital camera as well!



Note: If you already have a digital camera but it's more than two years old, you probably need a new one. So much has changed in the past few years that even the moderately priced models of yesterday aren't up to the photographic tasks required by this book.

The Megapixel Question

In the world of digital photography, the emphasis on the *megapixel* is way overblown. Indeed, it's a great marketing term, but you don't want to choose a digital camera based on a megapixel rating alone.

A megapixel is slang for 1 million picture elements. *Mega* means 1 million. *Pixel* is a contraction of *picture element*, or those dots that make up a digital image. An image composed of 1 million pixels is approximately the same size and resolution as the information displayed on a typical computer monitor. But to print a quality digital photo, you need more than 1 megapixel.

Digital cameras boast of megapixel ratings anywhere from the 3-megapixel range on up to 8 megapixels or more. Obviously, the more megapixels, the better. An image composed of 8 megapixels contains far more information than the same shot at 4 megapixels—but you're going to be paying more for the 8-megapixel camera.

For the digital photographs you'll be snapping in this book, a camera in the 5-megapixel range will be just fine. Avoid anything less.

Note: Some cameras proclaim higher megapixel ratings by using *interpolated* megapixel values. These are higher resolutions made possible through software magic, but the results are less than impressive. When shopping, look for *true* megapixel values, not interpolated.



Some Must-Have Camera Features

First, try to get an SLR digital camera. SLR stands for single-lens reflex, and it describes the type of camera that lets you look through the viewfinder and see *exactly* the image that you will take. Less-expensive digital cameras use separate viewfinders and lenses, which means that what you see is never exactly the image captured. Investing in an SLR saves you time when framing an image. A typical digital SLR camera is shown in Figure 3.1.



Figure 3.1
The Canon Digital Rebel,
a decent digital camera

Second, get a camera that has manual focus. Avoid cameras with a fixed focal length or those that use automatic focus with no manual override. You want to ensure that the camera is focused exactly where you want it, not where the camera's internal computer guesses is best.

Third, ensure that the camera has manual overrides for the aperture and shutter speed adjustments. Nearly all digital cameras have automatic aperture and shutter speed, but you want to be able to adjust both or either value. For example, you might want to set the aperture wide open or very tiny, and you might want to adjust the shutter speed for a longer exposure if necessary.

Note: If you're unfamiliar with these camera features, consider visiting a *real* camera store and not the camera counter in one of those large we-sell-everything type of stores. Yes, you'll pay a bit more, but for your dollar, you can ask questions and get the advice of the folks who know about the real stuff.



Fourth, make sure that you can override or disable the automatic flash. This is a common feature on most any camera with a built-in flash. (By the way, you don't need built-in flash for the projects in this book.)

Finally, get a large-capacity media card for your camera. You'll find that the mid-to-higher end "prosumer" cameras in this range often don't come with media cards—digital media being the "film" of a digital camera. Buy a high-quality, fast, digital media card in the 256MB to 512MB range.

Get a Good Lens

When you buy the type of medium-to-high-end camera this book recommends, you'll discover that it may not come with lens; the lens is a required extra. Sometimes the camera comes with a standard lens, but—especially at the camera stores—you'll have an option of which lens to choose.

Camera lenses come in five styles: normal, wide, macro, telephoto, and zoom. Regardless of the style, all lenses are measured by their focal length in millimeters (mm). Note that this is an *optical* measurement; the lens's physical length is shorter than its optical length.

Normal Lens

A normal lens renders an image roughly equivalent to what the eye sees. The objects and perspectives are the same as any human would perceive them, as shown in Figure 3.2, which was shot using a 55mm lens.



Figure 3.2
An image shot with a
55mm lens

For a standard 35mm film camera, a normal lens has a focal length of about 50mm. For a comparable digital camera, the focal length depends on the size of the camera's CCD (charge-coupled device), or the chip that reads the image. (This is related to the camera's megapixel resolution.)

The important thing to remember here is that the camera's normal lens focal length is different from that of a standard 35mm film camera. If you use a standard film camera normal lens on your digital camera, it will not be a normal lens but will tend to be more wide angle. Obviously this is important to know when selecting a lens! Get a normal lens specific to your digital camera.

Wide-Angle Lens

A wide-angle lens has a focal length shorter than a normal lens. The effect is that more information is visible through the lens—the field of vision is *wider*. It's also a bit distorted as shown in Figure 3.3, especially if you compare it with the same image shown in Figure 3.2.



Figure 3.3
The same image shot
with an 18mm lens

The focal length of a wide-angle lens ranges from just below the normal lens's focal length on down to what are called *fish-eye* lenses. Such a lens is used only for special effects or area-wide photography. Indeed, wide-angle lenses are pretty much an outdoors/environment/architecture type of photographic tool; they have little use in product photography.

Macro Lens

A macro lens is merely a closeup lens. But unlike the wide-angle lens, which also lets you get close to your subject, the macro lens does not distort the image. Because the macro lens's range of focus is very close to the camera, usually about 1 foot or less, this type of lens is ideal for taking pictures of small objects up close.

Vary rarely do you buy a macro lens by itself. Mostly they come as a feature of a normal or zoom lens. But if you plan to take pictures of small objects—particularly jewelry—you need a macro lens or at least the macro lens's ability on the zoom lens you choose. (Keep in mind that macro lenses for non-SLR digital cameras are available separately, and you will need a lens adapter to attach them.)

Telephoto Lens

Telephoto lens have a focal length longer than a normal lens. This type of lens allows you to photograph objects at a distance, bringing them in close. The distance is proportional to the lens's focal length; the longer the length, the farther the lens can see.

One issue to consider with a telephoto lens is that the longer they are, the less light comes through. Therefore, such lenses are best used in bright light situations. Even so, they can come in handy for product photography.

In Figure 3.4, you see the same image shown in Figures 3.2 and 3.3. In this case, the telephoto lens helps bring in the sides of the image. The differences between Figures 3.4 and 3.3 may be subtle, but in certain circumstances, photographers prefer the results achieved with a telephoto lens.



Figure 3.4
The same image shot
with a 105mm lens

Note: A specific use of a telephoto lens is as a portrait lens. For a standard 35mm film camera, the portrait lens has a focal length between 80 and 120mm. At that focal length, people's faces photograph extremely well and natural, which is why such a focal length is called a "portrait" lens.



Zoom Lens

Of all the lens types available, you'll most likely be getting a zoom lens with your SLR digital camera. Such a lens has multiple focal lengths, using a twisting ring to set the focal length smoothly from wide to normal to telephoto.

Get a zoom lens that offers a good range of focal lengths without busting your budget. Major camera companies offer a range of zoom lenses, from very wide to very long, but all at a price. Instead of getting all the options, get a nice general-purpose zoom lens. A standard zoom is probably offered with the camera. That will do fine.

Don't forget the macro focus ability! If you plan to take pictures of small objects, such as jewelry, you might want to pay more and get a standard zoom lens that has macro focus. You'll be thankful later.

Get a Tripod!

The tripod is one of the best, most useful, and necessary accessories to your digital camera—so much so that it's listed here in this chapter as opposed to Chapter 2, which is about your photo studio. Always think of your camera with the tripod firmly attached.

Note: Never take any product image without using a tripod!



The tripod provides a firm, stable, yet adjustable base for your digital camera. It helps to ensure that once you've set up and framed your image, the camera—and the image it takes—remains consistent between shots. If you have to adjust a light or prop up a background, the camera takes the same shot over and over. That way you can concentrate on the shot instead of holding the camera.

Figure 3.5 shows an example of how you can hold the camera still while working to fix various problems. Assume that the object is set up properly, framed, and ready to go. The tripod holds the camera steady as you work to eliminate various nasty shadows and ugly reflections. By keeping the camera still, the tripod ensures that once a shadow was gone, it stays gone. Such a feat is impossible without a tripod.

With a tripod, you can also perform some handy camera tricks, such as a longer exposure. If you try such a stunt with a handheld camera, the result is invariably jerky or fuzzy. The tripod gives you the latitude to take those longer exposures when necessary, which lets you capture the exact image you want.



Figure 3.5 The tripod helped keep this shot steady while the photographer was careful to eliminate a host of nasty shadows and reflections.

In Figure 3.6, the object was rather dimly lit. To compensate, a longer exposure was required. Only with a tripod could the camera be held steady for that length of time, and with the crisp results you see in the image.



Figure 3.6
Can you tell this image was taken using an exposure of 4 seconds?

Finding the Focus

The focus is a point at some distance from the camera where an object appears sharp and clear. When the focus is properly set on an item, that item is said to be *in focus*. Objects before and after that distance are slightly to grossly out of focus, or fuzzy and ill-defined.

Due to the nature of the human eyeball, people prefer to look at objects in focus and ignore or pay less heed to objects out of focus. By using a specific focus, a photographer can control what your eye concentrates on in an image. The same image can also contain out-of-focus objects—and the eye still sees them—but they're downplayed and given less importance.

In Figure 3.7, the eye naturally finds the starfish. That object is in focus. Other shells and objects appear in the image, and they help to reinforce a tide-pool theme, but being out of focus, they merely act as seasoning to the main dish, the starfish.



Figure 3.7
The starfish is in focus, but the shells around it are out of focus. The human eye concentrates on the item in focus.

To find the focus for an object, you must first know what it is you want to focus on. Obviously, that must be the item you're selling, preferably the front side of that item or the end closest to the camera. You can find this focus in two ways. The first is to use the camera's lens in the manual focus mode. You look through the eyepiece or viewfinder and rotate the lens's focus ring until the image appears sharply in the viewfinder.



Note: In Hollywood, movie cameras are focused with the help of measuring tape. The distance between the film plane (where the film is exposed in the camera) and the object being filmed (say, Mel Gibson's nose) is precisely measured. The camera's focus is then set to that exact measurement. You can do this with your camera as well, providing that the measurement on the lens's focus ring is marked off in appropriate lengths. If your camera is capable of manual focus, the film plane may be marked on the camera's top using the Φ symbol.

The second way to focus is using the camera's autofocus mode, though a degree of sophistication comes into play here. Some cameras focus by using infrared light. In that case, the light must properly be aimed at the object being focused. Some cameras may have a point-and-set focus system, and in that case, you use the camera's viewfinder to set the focus to whatever you're looking at in the frame. This second method is more accurate in that you can precisely select which part of the image to aim and focus at.

Here are a few things to keep in mind about focus:

- If you're using automatic focus, check to see if the camera has an Auto Focus Lock or similar feature. That way, when the proper focus is set, the camera remembers the distance and won't change the focus between shots.
- When in doubt about the focus, take a test shot. View that image on your computer screen and zoom in to confirm that the object is in focus.
- According to the design of the camera's lens, only objects at a specific distance from the camera will be in exact focus. However, you can increase the size of this focus "field" by adjusting the lens's aperture to create a deeper depth of field. Refer to the section "Understanding Depth of Field" later in this chapter.

Controlling the Exposure

You can control how an image is exposed in two ways. Both methods manage the amount of light entering the camera and exposing the film. (Or, in the case of a digital camera, exposing light to the electronic CCD chip that interprets the image.)

The first control is the aperture. The second control is the *shutter speed*. These items are normally set automatically. In fact, setting them manually was one of the annoying things people disliked with old manual cameras. But you'll want to understand both aperture and shutter speed, and how they play a role in creating the image taken, if you want full control over your photographs.

Setting the Aperture

An aperture is an opening. In this case, the hole through which light passes in the lens on its way into the camera body. All camera lenses have apertures, and the better lenses have an adjustable aperture so that you can make the hole as big or tiny as you like, as shown in Figure 3.8.

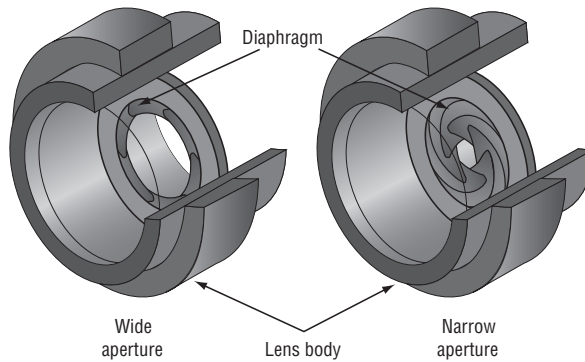


Figure 3.8
An iris diaphragm is used to adjust the aperture inside the lens. The diaphragm is open on the left for a wide aperture, and it's closed down (but not all the way) on the right for a smaller aperture.

On today's cameras, the aperture is adjusted electronically, but on a good digital camera, it can be set manually as well as automatically. Long gone are the days when the aperture was adjusted by twisting a special ring on the lens.

The aperture's size is measured as a ratio called an *f-stop*. The ratio is defined as the lens's focal length divided by the size of the aperture, which is depicted in Figure 3.9.

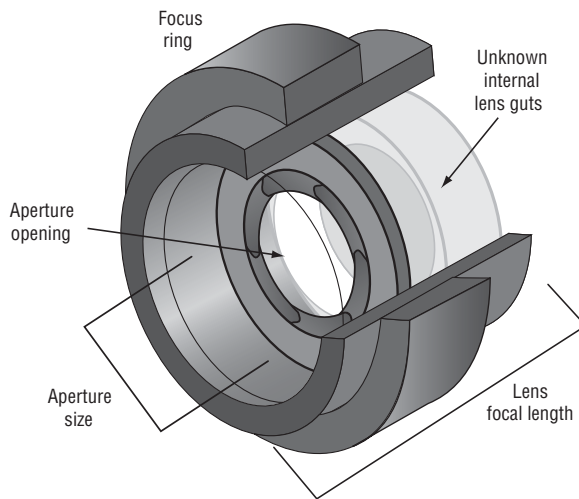


Figure 3.9
A typical SLR lens, cross-section

For example, suppose you're using a 50mm lens and the aperture opening is 12.5mm in diameter. That's an *f-stop* value of 4, written as $f/4$; $50\text{mm} \div 12.5\text{mm}$ is 4. By using this method (creating a ratio), all lens, regardless of their length or diameter, can share common *f-stop* ratings.

If you can remember that an *f-stop* value is a ratio, you can better understand that larger *f-stop* values mean smaller openings and that smaller *f-stop* values mean larger options. Or if you work with wire, understand that *f-stop* values work like wire gauges; the larger the value, the thinner the wire.

When the aperture is open as wide as it can go, the *f-stop* value decreases. Say the widest that the aperture can open in a 50mm lens is about 38mm in diameter. That's an *f-stop* ratio of $50/38$ or $f/1.4$. That's considered a *fast* value because the lens is letting in a lot of light.

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Smaller apertures yield larger f-stop values. So an aperture that narrows down to a diameter of only 2.5mm gives you f/22 in a 50mm lens. Very little light is coming through the lens with such a high f-stop value.

As a ratio, the f-stop values are equivalent for all lens, regardless of the focal length. For example, if you have a 200mm telephoto lens, an aperture diameter of 50mm is equal to f/4. Figure 3.10 tries to clarify this concept. Here are the common f-stop values:

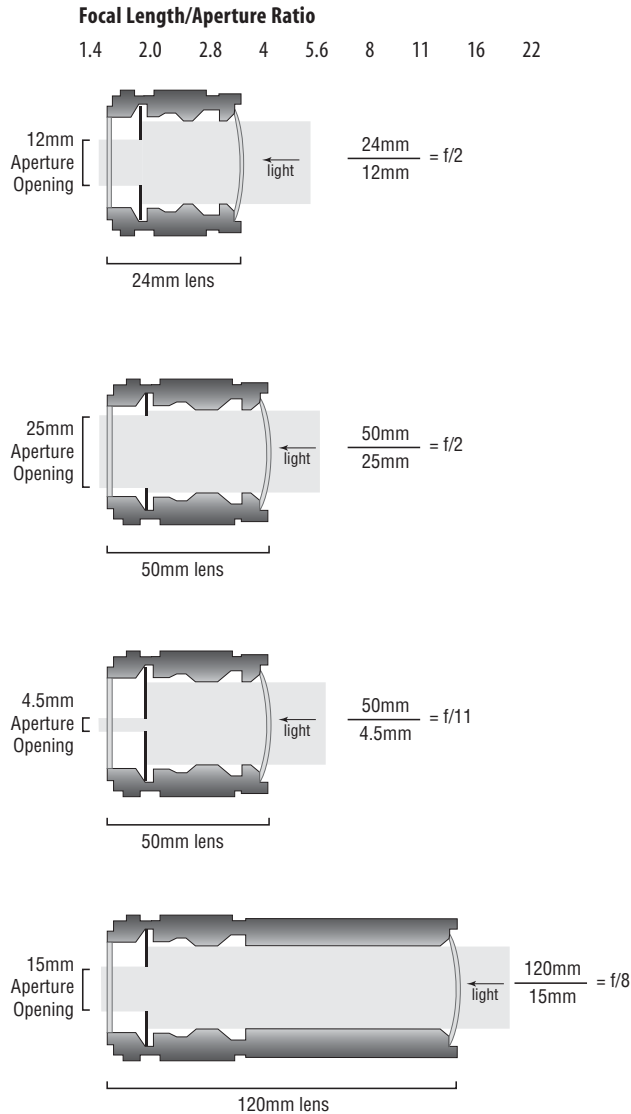


Figure 3.10
 Various lens focal lengths, apertures, and f-stop ratings



Note: A lens's focal length does not always equal the lens's actual size. Due to fancy optics inside, the lens is usually shorter than its given focal length. But optically, the focal length appears as measured.

What is important with all this gobbledegook? Simply understand this: Large f-stop numbers mean smaller apertures; small f-stop numbers mean wider apertures. (In math, that makes sense because the larger the denominator, the smaller the fraction. That is, $f/4$ is larger than $f/22$.)

Even if you understand all this stuff so far, the point of the f-stop has little to do with the amount of light entering the lens. True, $f/1.8$ allows more light in than does $f/11$. But so what? Changing the exposure time easily compensates for the presence or absence of light.

The reason for an adjustable aperture is not about light at all. No, it's about *focus*. Specifically, the diaphragm controls something called the depth of field. That's an important issue for this book, and it's covered later in this chapter.

Note: The maximum f-stop value is often used to rate how “fast” a lens is. You'll note that different lenses have different maximum f-stop values. One might sport $f/2$ while another might have $f/1.4$ or even $f/1.2$. The lower the value, the “faster” the lens—but also the more expensive it is.



Using the Correct Shutter Speed

The shutter is the device that shields the camera's film from the light of the outside world. When the shutter is open, the film—or in a digital camera, the CCD chip that captures the digital image—is exposed to the light passing through (and focused by) the lens. When the shutter is closed, no light passes through. Normally the shutter is closed except for when the picture is snapped and the film exposed.

Note: In an SLR camera, opening the shutter blanks out the viewfinder. For the brief time that the shutter is open, you won't see anything. Some folks notice this, and others don't.



Very cheap cameras have a fixed shutter speed. Those antique Kodak Brownie box cameras used a simple spring-loaded shutter that exposed the film for about $1/60$ second no matter what the light conditions. Even today, disposable cameras use the same type of system.

Midrange cameras use a light sensor to electronically adjust the shutter speed to certain preset values. Even high-end cameras use such a sensor, though the range of shutter-speed values is wider. In fact, it's that light sensor that automatically turns on the camera's built-in flash when necessary.

With the type of digital camera recommended for this book, the shutter-speed value must be adjustable manually or have a manual override to the automatic adjustment. Either way, the shutter speed's value is measured in seconds or fractions of a second. The value represents the duration that the camera's shutter is open, allowing the image to be exposed to light.

Common shutter-speed values (in seconds) are set in increments as described in this list. Even so, some cameras may sport in-between speeds not listed in the table.

Common Shutter-Speed Values

8 seconds	$\frac{1}{15}$ second
4 seconds	$\frac{1}{30}$ second
2 seconds	$\frac{1}{60}$ second
1 second	$\frac{1}{125}$ second
$\frac{1}{2}$ second	$\frac{1}{250}$ second
$\frac{1}{4}$ second	$\frac{1}{500}$ second
$\frac{1}{8}$ second	$\frac{1}{1000}$ second



Note: Some cameras have a speed setting of B or Bulb. In that mode, the shutter is kept open as long as the button is being pressed. The B mode is used for very long time exposures, for example, for nighttime shots or photographs of lighting.

When set in automatic mode, a digital camera selects a shutter speed and aperture value based on information from the light sensor. The speed value is set in conjunction with the lens aperture to properly expose the image.

Note that there is a balance between aperture and shutter speed, which is necessary in order for enough light to pass through the lens and properly expose the image.

When a smaller aperture is being used ($f/11$ or $f/22$), a longer exposure time is required for the shutter speed. Wider apertures ($f/2$ or $f/4$) allow more light in through the lens, so a shorter shutter speed can be selected. But there's more to it than that.

Fast shutter speeds are best for capturing action images. For example, a sports photographer wants to use the fastest shutter speed they can get away with. That's because most sports involve movement, and the idea is to freeze a moving object in motion with a shutter speed of $\frac{1}{500}$ or $\frac{1}{1000}$ of a second. Anything slower, and the image will blur—which might be an interesting effect, but often not what is wanted.

Slow shutter speeds can do two things for you. First, they allow you to capture images in low-light situations. Combined with a tripod to hold the camera steady, you can set up a 1- or 8-second exposure, bringing enough light into the camera to get detail in even the darkest situations.



Note: Obviously, for longer shutter speeds, it helps if the object you're photographing is relatively stationary. It's also a must to mount the camera on a tripod. A human being cannot hold a camera still for any shutter speed less than $\frac{1}{60}$ of a second.

The second advantage of a slower shutter speed is that it lets you use a smaller aperture to properly get a wide depth of field for your photographs. That subject is covered in the next section.

For taking product shots, adjusting the depth of field is the best reason to mess with the aperture and shutter speed. Beyond that, you might find yourself adjusting the shutter speed to put more light on your subject. For example, if your photograph comes out dark or needs more light, you can halve the shutter speed to let more light expose the image. That's simpler than hauling in more lights, and “keeping it simple” is one of this book's basic rules.

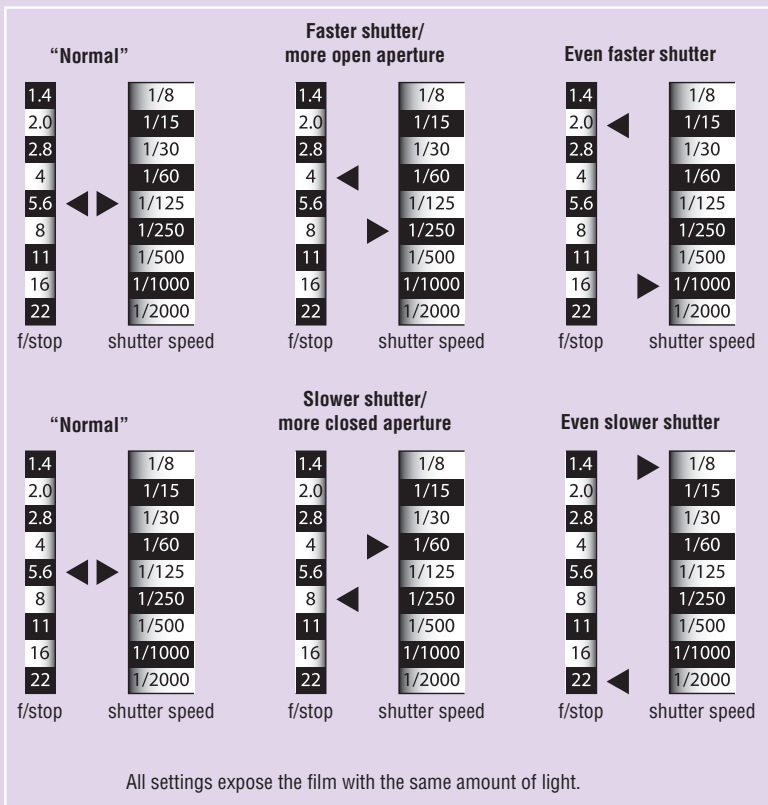
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Automatically Setting the Exposure

In cameras with automatic exposure, the camera sets both the aperture and shutter speed. First, the light coming into the lens is measured and the exposure calculated. Second, an aperture is selected along with a matching shutter speed to equal the exact exposure. How does the camera know which settings to choose? It doesn't. It just guesses.

On some automatic cameras, you can choose whether to prioritize the aperture or shutter speed. You can do so manually or by choosing the type of photograph you're taking. For example, the camera may have a "sports" setting. In that mode, the shutter speed is prioritized and set to a fast value. To compensate, the aperture is adjusted accordingly so that the film is properly exposed. Likewise, the camera may have an indoors or low-light setting; in that case, the aperture is set wide open and the shutter speed is set longer to compensate.

All these settings work because of the relationship between the aperture and the shutter speed. For example, an automatic camera determines the exposure is $f/5.6$ at $1/125$ of a second. The same amount of light comes into the camera if you open the aperture to $f/4$ and increase the shutter speed to $1/250$ second. Likewise, you can close the aperture to $f/8$, but you must decrease the shutter speed to $1/60$ second. (See the following illustration.)



Continued on next page

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Automatically Setting the Exposure (Continued)

You make these kinds of adjustments for three reasons. The first reason is simply to drive you nuts. It's the reason automatic cameras are sold in the first place; back in the old days, you had to understand this stuff *plus* use a separate device called a light meter to help you choose an exposure. It was insane.

The second reason to adjust the values is to increase or decrease the shutter speed depending on the subject. As was stated earlier, you might want a fast shutter speed when photographing sports or something that moves quickly. Or you might want to capture flowing water, which looks better when taken with a long exposure.

The final reason is to adjust the aperture and increase the depth of field. When you narrow the aperture, you must slow down the shutter to compensate for the lack of light. Conversely, opening the aperture to narrow the depth of field requires adjusting the shutter speed.

Shutter speed gets quicker, the aperture opens; shutter speed gets longer, the aperture closes.

Understanding Depth of Field

The optics inside a lens are designed so that objects at an exact distance from the camera are in perfect focus. The better lenses have the focal distances printed right on the focus ring. Whether you're focusing automatically or manually, you can confirm the distance by looking at the lens.

According to the lens's markings, objects can be in focus from a few feet on up to infinity. (Funny thing: beyond a certain distance, all objects are considered "in focus," which isn't exactly true, but it's how the human eye interprets and is comfortable viewing objects far away.)

Of course, you've taken pictures before, and you realize that the spot where items are in focus isn't an exact location. Oftentimes, objects immediately before and behind the item you're focused on appear to be in focus as well. That range before and behind the object in focus is referred to as the *depth of field*. Figure 3.11 illustrates how this works.

In Figure 3.11, the camera is focused exactly on the front of object B. Even so, because of the large depth of field, both object A, close to the camera, and object C, away from the camera, appear to be in focus.

The depth of field seems like a wonderful concept, and it is. But what makes it truly useful is that you can adjust it. You can make it shallow or deep. The key is the *aperture*.

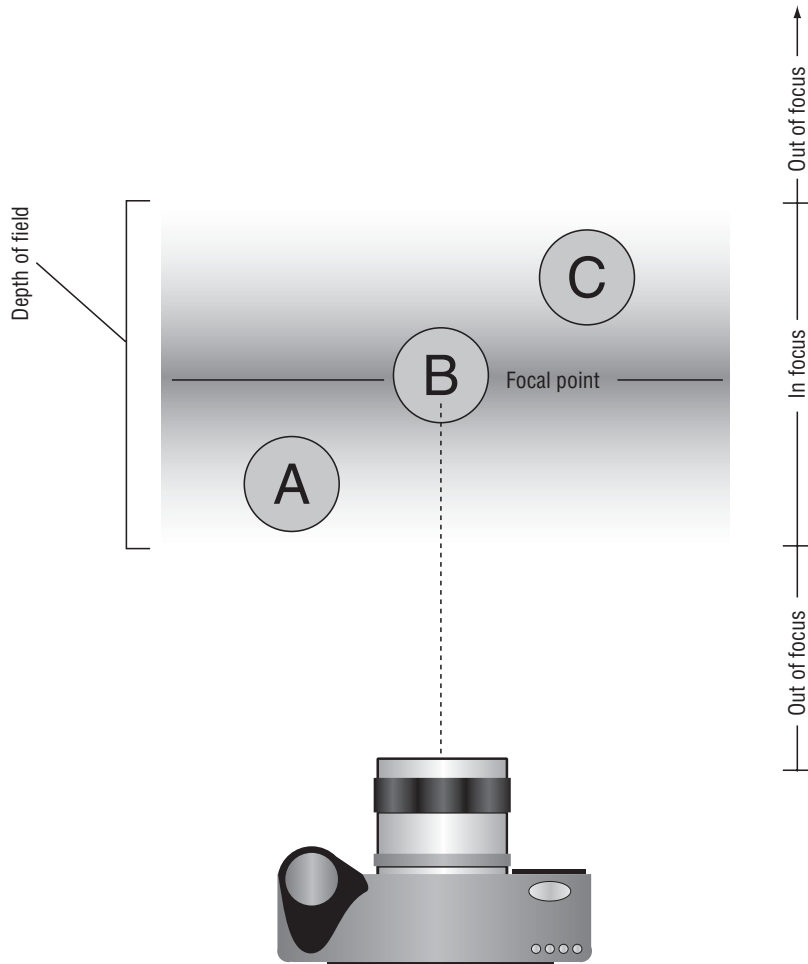


Figure 3.11 A depth of field exists before and after the exact point where an object is in focus.

When the lens's aperture is set wide open, such as $f/4$ or greater, the depth of field is very shallow. Only the objects that the camera is directly focused on will be in focus. Things in front of and behind the image will be out of focus.

In Figure 3.12, the dessert in the foreground has an extremely narrow depth of field. The objects behind the dessert are out of focus, visible yet obscured. Yet this is the effect that the photographer wanted, and it draws your attention to the items in focus while downplaying the environment surrounding them.



Figure 3.12
A very shallow depth
of field

When the lens's aperture is set narrow or closed, such as $f/11$ or smaller, the depth of field is great. In that case, objects in front of and behind the item in focus also appear in focus.

Now you should understand why it's necessary to have a digital camera with a manual override on the shutter speed and aperture. Only with such an override can you manually adjust the aperture and set the proper depth of field. Remember: With a larger aperture ($f/4$, $f/2.8$, $f/2$, $f/1.4$), you get a shallow depth of field. In Figure 3.13, an aperture of $f/1.8$ narrows the focus to the pawn up front while the background pieces are rendered out of focus. The shutter speed was adjusted faster to compensate for the wide-open aperture.

With a smaller aperture, you get a great depth of field. Just about everything in the picture will be in focus, as shown in Figure 3.14 in which the entire chessboard is in focus. It's the same shot setup as shown in Figure 3.13, though the aperture has been closed to $f/11$ and the shutter speed cranked down to compensate.



Figure 3.13
Shallow depth of field



Figure 3.14
Deep depth of field



Note: A good way to remember which aperture gives you greater depth of field is that people who need glasses often squint without them. Squinting helps reduce the eye's aperture, increasing the depth of field to bring more items into focus.

Positioning the Camera

An important part of snapping the right image is making sure that the camera is in the proper orientation, that the image is framed, and that the right amount of zoom is applied. You want to set up the item being photographed, then set up the camera, and then set up the lights. Only after that preparation are you ready to take the picture.



Note: Obviously having a tripod here is vital! Once set, the camera must not move. Otherwise, you introduce a whole slew of new random variables into the equation. Isn't there enough to worry about without having to add in camera jiggle? Yep! Get a tripod!

Setting the Right Angle

Ideally you want to photograph your object head-on, showing the object in an upright position but not directly facing the camera. You want to set the item off at an angle so that a bit of one side is showing. If the item is small, showing some of the top is also a good idea.

Simply set up the object in the environment or on an infinite horizon, whichever you feel is best to set the emotional tone for your image.

Unless the object is flat, you want to show that it has some depth, so angle the object off to one side. The angle is really only necessary to show that the item isn't flat. In fact, when the item is flat, you just want to take an image of it head-on.

In Figure 3.15, the candle lacks depth and definition. Although you can make out the frogs perhaps, the object's full description isn't really present. On eBay, you frequently find a series of several such images: front, back, and both sides, when one clever camera angle would do instead.

In Figure 3.16, you see the same object as in Figure 3.15, but with the camera angle raised a bit and the object skewed to the right. This helps the buyer appreciate the object's height and depth, the object's overall shape, and that it is, in fact, a candidate for purchase. Moving the camera gives the object dimension and weight that a head-on, thoughtless angle doesn't capture.

There are no specific rules as far as camera height is concerned. Obviously you don't want to go too high above an object or you make it appear tiny. And you don't want to go too far to the left or right without encountering the same head-on problem. Yet as long as you can capture the object's depth and overall shape, anything else as far as setting the angle is concerned is simply a matter of taste and style.



Figure 3.15
A dead-on angle makes this candle appear flat and without dimension.



Figure 3.16
A better angle on the same frogs

Note: If an item is cylindrical or spherical, you definitely want to set a higher angle than you normally would. That will help capture the circular shape of the object.



Zooming (or Not)

It's most likely that your digital camera has a zoom lens. That's great! But the zoom does affect your image and has the potential to make even the most beautiful item look ugly.

The main thing to avoid is the wide-angle setting on the zoom lens. That's when the lens is "pulled back" to reveal the most information. Such a wide angle distorts items up close, making them look disproportional, as shown in Figure 3.17.



Figure 3.17
With the lens set on wide angle, this photograph appears distorted and, well, ugly.

The opposite end of the zoom lens, the narrow angle, is much better for taking product shots. When "zoomed in" all the way, the optics in a zoom lens tend to push out the edges on an object. On a person, this makes their face look more natural. For a product, it can help pull in details on the side, as shown in Figure 3.18.



Figure 3.18
The same setup as Figure 3.17, but with the tripod set back and the camera zoomed in. The objects appear more natural.

The best way to encapsulate this information is to say that it is not necessary to put the camera very close to the image you're capturing. In fact, keeping the camera at a modest distance and using the zoom lens to help get closer renders a better picture.

Note: The only time you want to avoid using a closer (zoomed-in) angle is when you need a tight depth of field. That's because the depth of field increases with the lens length. For the most dramatic shallow depth of field, do not zoom in on an object. But when you need the widest depth of field, zooming in helps increase the field size.



Framing the Image

Finally there comes framing. That's the act of looking at the edges of the image that the camera previews. You first want to ensure that the image you're photographing is well inside the frame. You don't want to commit the sin of "chopping off the heads" and making your image look incomplete or sloppy.

Try to keep some distance between the edges of the frame and your object. You don't want the object to appear cramped. On the other hand, you don't want the object to be so tiny in the image that the viewer has trouble recognizing it.

Also watch the edge of the image to ensure that nothing annoying or unwanted is in the background. For example, if your item is sitting on a nice sheet of pretty wrapping paper, you don't want to photograph the edge of that sheet and the ugly table beneath it in the background.

In Figure 3.19, you see a combination of efforts described in this and previous sections, all of which are applied to make a good image.



Figure 3.19
The proper lighting, depth of field, angle, zoom, and framing are combined to take this image.

The image is set up right before the camera and lit using natural light that shows off the shape of each cookie. The depth of field has been set to keep the background out of focus, helping the buyer concentrate on the cookies. The image is framed so that the stack of cookies is centered.

When you set up your shot, and you focus, frame, zoom, and set exposure, keep in mind the background details, and prevent them from distracting from or lining up with the object in the foreground. When items do match up, and tangents are created, move the object or adjust the camera so that such a thing doesn't happen.



Note: In order: set the camera, and then set the item being photographed. Zoom in on the item. Finally, frame the image. After that, you can work on lighting and perhaps even adjust the angles, zoom, or framing a bit as needed.

Setting Image Resolution

Your digital camera has an image-resolution setting. This tells the camera how many of those silly megapixels to assign to the image being taken. For example, when snapping birthday pictures for e-mail, you can choose the low, Web, or e-mail setting. That way, the images look great on a computer screen, and they don't take a day and a half to send over the Internet.

For taking pictures of products that sell, you want to use the camera's maximum resolution. This won't be the final resolution you use for the images, but for taking the images, you want *pixels!* The more the merrier. That's because more pixels equals more information and the easier it is to edit the image later (should you have to) and to produce a higher-quality final result—even if that final result has a reduced resolution.

How big is too big? As long as the image can fit on the media card, it's not too big! Set up your camera to snap images at the highest resolution.



Note: When it comes to professional photography, information is the key. When shooting on negative film, some pros slightly overexpose; when shooting on transparency film, they will slightly underexpose. Both methods are used to get more of that "juicy information" on the film. The transparency method applies to digital film; higher resolutions get more of those precious pixels into the image. Information is the key to producing a quality end result. Or, to put it another way, you can't fake what's not there.

Lighting Your Object

Yes, you will need a modicum of light to illuminate the object that you're photographing. It almost goes without saying. The inspiration here is the sun, which douses the world daily with light and forms the basis on which we view things in the real world. The better you can use or emulate the sun—especially the type of light produced on an overcast day—the more natural your photographs appear. That's exactly what you want. Well, that, and to be able to properly see the subject.

Shedding Some Light on Your Subject

You can light the object that you're photographing in many possible ways, but there is one definitely wrong way to do it: with your camera's flash. If you can, disable your camera's built-in flash. Turn it off. Do away with it. Forgo it. That is the worst, most unattractive light you can shed on your subject.

Compare Figures 3.20 and 3.21. Can you tell just by looking which was taken using the camera's automatic flash? Which looks more natural? Which item would you rather buy?



Figure 3.20
The camera's automatic flash wrecks this image.



Figure 3.21
The same setup as Figure 3.17, but properly lit



Note: Refer to your camera's manual for instructions on disabling the built-in flash. The flash control may be on the camera's LCD menu, or it could be a button labeled with a lightning-bolt-like symbol.

Instead of your camera's flash, use lamps and diffusion material (covered in Chapter 2) to illuminate your subject matter naturally. There is no right or wrong way to do this, but there is a good way to start.

Use two lamps. Position each at a 90-degree angle to the left and right of your subject at approximately a 45-degree elevation. Figure 3.22 attempts to illustrate this approach. The end result may not be what you want, but you will find that the object is evenly illuminated. And it's a good place to start.

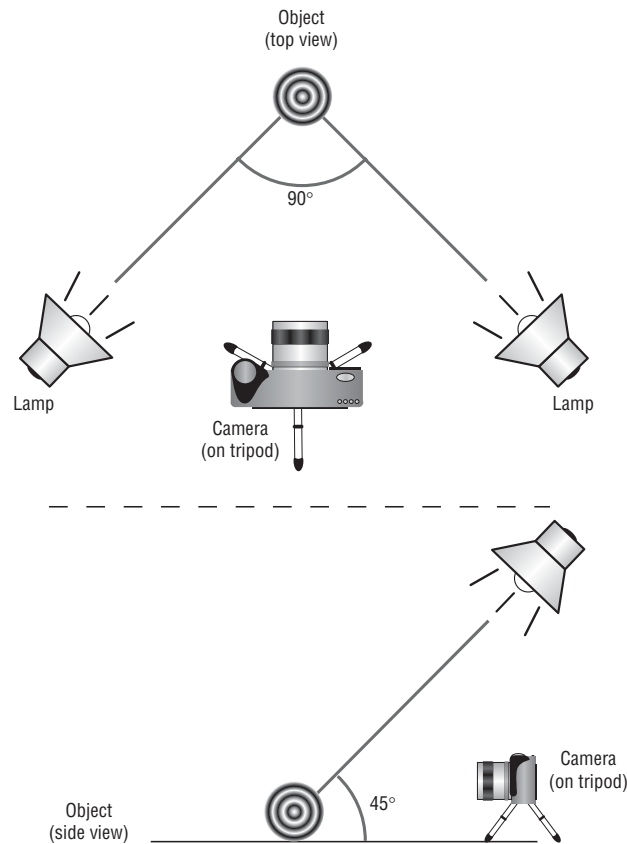


Figure 3.22
A good way to start positioning the lamps

When you have the lamps set up, look through the camera to see your object. Check to ensure that it's properly lit. But also look for annoying glare. If you see glare through the viewfinder, it will be there in the final image. Refer to the next section.

Remember that you can also light an image with white paper or white foam core, as recommended in Chapter 2. Prop up some foam core out of camera view to help reflect or bounce some light from the main light source back onto the object photographed.

Another helpful tool in lighting your subject is the sun itself. Feel free to take advantage of a bright window.

Finally, don't forget that you can move your lamps! That's why it's recommended that you find and use lamps with handy clamps on the back. You can add more lamps if you have them, or you can remove a lamp if it's unnecessary or gets in the way.

Eliminating Reflections and Glare

As you light your subject, you need to constantly check through the camera to ensure that there are no obnoxious reflections or glare. You can deal with reflections in two ways. First, move the light causing the reflection. Move it in small increments because determining the angles and such is really guesswork.

Second, use black paper or black foam core to help block reflections off shiny objects. After determining the source of the reflection, mask it by using the black paper—essentially covering up the reflection's source.

Figure 3.23 shows a thimble-sized glass with a glaring reflection inside the top left of the lip. After checking in the camera, the source of the reflection was determined, and a piece of black paper hung to mask the light, effectively eliminating the glare. The setup is shown in Figure 3.24, and the result is shown in Figure 3.25, where the glare is gone.



Figure 3.23
A bad reflection detracts from this image.

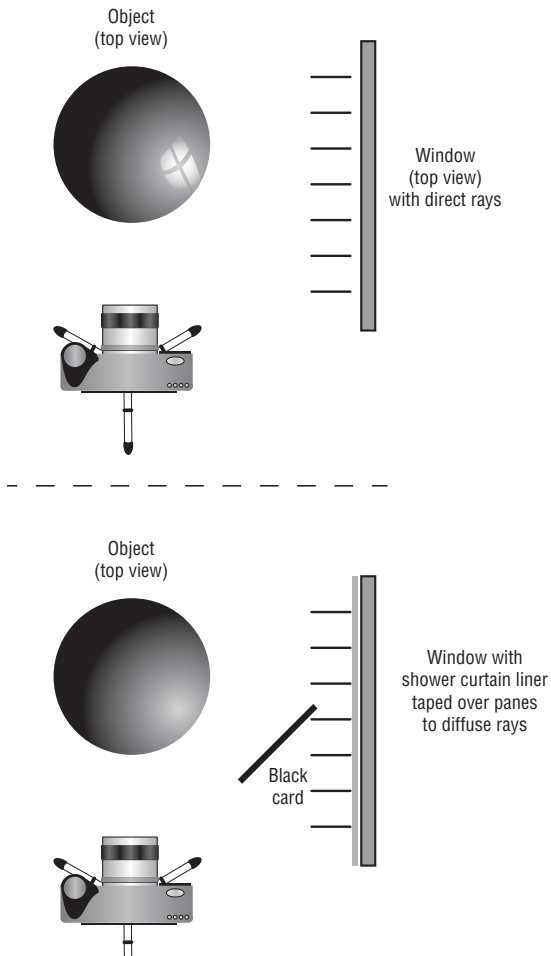


Figure 3.24
How the glare was eliminated by using a black card



Figure 3.25
The same glass, minus the glare

For other sources of glare, you're going to need patience and a lot of trial and error. You can choose to move either the subject or the lamps. However, when you're using more than one lamp, you'll find it a lot easier to move the lamps than to constantly move the subject. Sometimes it can help to remove a lamp and just go with a longer exposure. (That means decreasing the shutter speed, say from $\frac{1}{30}$ to $\frac{1}{15}$.)

And do keep in mind that there is no proper position for the lamps. The information provided here will help you get started. After that, it's what looks good, what works, and what produces the best image.

Note: Keep in mind that it's always best to eliminate the glare before you take the picture, not to eliminate it in the photo-editing program.



Dealing with Shadows

Shadows naturally fall from anything that you're lighting and photographing, but you don't want the shadows to distract or to look like something else (puddles of oil, for example). One reason for diffusing your lamps is to create a nice soft shadow behind or to the side of your subject. That's acceptable. But shadows directly on a subject are not.

When you take a picture of a person out under the blazing noonday sun, that person will have an obnoxious under-the-nose shadow. Most amateurs don't notice this, but it's the bane of professionals. Such ugly shadows are also something you should look for when you light your subjects.

The best way to eliminate a shadow is to add more light. But moving your lights can also move or reduce the shadows. Move a lamp up higher, and the shadow gets shorter. Lower a lamp or use a white card to bounce light, and you can help fill under edges like a face under the brim of a hat.

Note: Do not light your subject from the bottom. It looks extremely unnatural.



Beyond the shadows on your object, remember that the object itself will be casting a shadow. This is fine and normal. Most items you light will have what's called a *drop shadow*. For the best look, keep the size of that shadow about $\frac{1}{3}$ the size of the object that you're photographing.

You may recall the small clock you saw earlier in this chapter (see Figure 3.5), which demonstrated the good use of a tripod. That shot also started out with some nasty shadows from the daytime sun shining through a window (see Figure 3.26).



Figure 3.26 The sun shining through the window (left) casts some shadows on our subject (right).

Remember your handy shower curtain liner? You may also use it to help with natural lighting conditions and eliminating shadows (see Figure 3.27).



Figure 3.27 Another slice of shower curtain helps eliminate daytime shadows.



Note: It's also possible to eliminate all shadows and surrounding material around an object in a photo-editing program. This is demonstrated in the next chapter.

If you're having a great deal of trouble eliminating a shadow, as a last resort you can manually adjust the camera so that the image is overexposed. To do so, leave the aperture setting the same but slow down the shutter speed, say from $\frac{1}{60}$ second down to $\frac{1}{30}$ or $\frac{1}{15}$. The extra exposure will help pull in detail for the shadow areas. The image can then be adjusted using photo-editing software.

Shooting Objects Outside

When you're outside, the sun is your lamp. And like the lamps in your photo studio, the sun can be moved. Or, to put it another way, you can wait for a specific time of day

when the sun is positioned just right for your photograph. This is perhaps the most important decision to make when shooting outside: where is the sun? or what is the best time of day to take the picture?

Again, wait for an overcast day to take a picture outside. That's the best light you can have, and it utterly eliminates hard shadows. Figure 3.28 was taken on an overcast day. Notice the absence of annoying shadows. In fact, there is almost no shadow at all, which means that all concentration is on the tray and chopsticks.



Figure 3.28 A good picture taken on an overcast day

When overcast days aren't possible, the best time of day to take pictures is during what professional photographers call the *magic hour*. It's a chunk of time, anywhere from 20 to 40 minutes long, just after the sun goes down. At that time, the light outside is very soft. The sky seems to glow. And there are no shadows. This is when most car advertisements are shot. It's a great time of day to capture a large object or anything that you need to take a photograph of outside.

Note: If you do plan to photograph a car, be aware of reflections. Nothing is more distracting than an ugly reflection on a car's door or in a window. In fact, there are professionals who only photograph cars. Doing it right is a rare talent.





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Photo Editing

The digital darkroom is anything but dark. Gone are the days when developing film was a chemical process. No more baths. No more fixer. No more groping in the dark to thread film reels, maintaining dust-free cabinets, or washing your prints.

Photography is now totally digital.

The images in your digital camera are already fully developed. There they sit ready for immediate use, but most of the time it's necessary to run them through some type of photo-editing application. You use that software to refine, crop, rotate, or make adjustments that hone the image to get the perfect result—tasks that would be tedious and nearly impossible in the chemical labs of old.

This chapter covers some popular photo-editing techniques you can use to help fix up and enhance your images.

4

In This Chapter

- Photo-editing basics
- Fixing color, tone, and balance
- Sharpening
- When you want to blur
- Compositing
- Watermarking

TEAM LING - LIVE, INFORMATIVE, NON-COST AND GENUINE !

Basic Photo-Editing Techniques

Today's photo-editing software is capable of amazing things. Most programs boast about libraries of routines, filters, techniques, tools, and a host of helpful options designed to let you do just about anything possible with your image. Mastering such software takes years. No one book could possibly cover everything these programs do, but the good news is that you don't have to use all the tools to get the results you want.

It's perfectly okay to use just the basics of your photo-editing program. That is, you should understand how to save, zoom, rotate, crop, and resize and have a working knowledge of a few other handy tricks covered in this chapter. That's probably all you need to know to get the results you want—especially if you followed this book's advice and did most of your work with the camera as opposed to “fixing it later.”

These basic tools are available in just about every image-editing program. The steps that follow are specific to Adobe Photoshop Elements 3, but the end result should be the same: a better version of your image.



Note: See Chapter 7 for information on getting the images out of your digital camera and into your computer.

Zooming Your Image

The basic tool in any photo-editing program is the Zoom tool. Zoom is different from most other photo-editing tools in that it does absolutely nothing to modify the image. Instead, it merely changes how you see the image on your computer's monitor.

When an image is first loaded into your photo editor, the Zoom tool may automatically reduce the image size so that the whole picture appears on the screen. The zoom percentage is displayed either on the application's title bar or on the title bar of the window containing the zoomed image.

In Figure 4.1, the image is shown in the window at 68 percent resolution. Because the image would be too large to fit on the entire screen at 100 percent resolution, the program automatically *zooms out* to show you the entire thing.

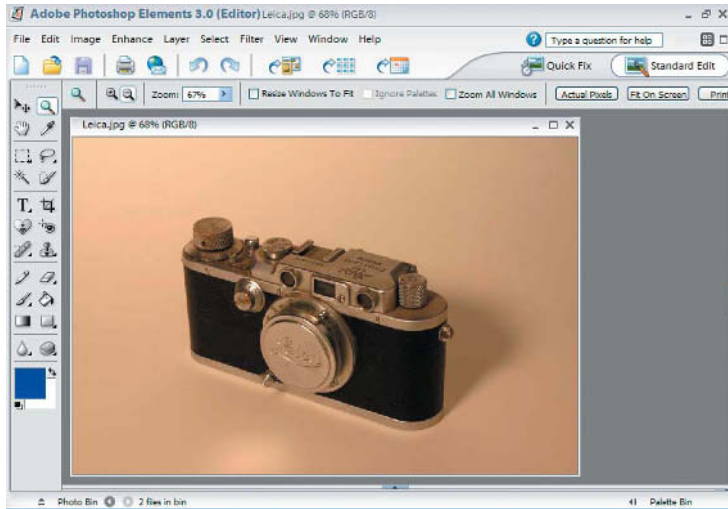



Figure 4.1
Images shown in a photo-editing program can be viewed larger or smaller by using the Zoom tool.

1. Here's how you use the Zoom tool to magnify an image and inspect details:
1. Click the Zoom tool button, or in Photoshop Elements, press **Z** on your keyboard.
Note how the mouse pointer changes to the Zoom tool , a magnifying glass with a + (plus). The plus means “zooming in!”
2. Click the Zoom tool on a specific part of the image to make that part appear larger. And you *zoom in* on that part of the image.

Note: You can use the mouse pointer to direct the zoom. Where you click the mouse becomes the center of the next window.




3. Continue clicking until you can see the boxy color squares, or pixels that compose the image.
Most photo-editing programs let you zoom in to about 1600 percent. That's 16 times magnification on the image.
When you're done zooming and can zoom in no further, the plus disappears from the mouse pointer's magnifying glass. That's the all-done signal.

Note: At some point, when you've zoomed in enough, you can use the Hand tool to slide the image around inside the window. The keyboard shortcut for the Hand tool is to press and hold the spacebar. Then use the mouse to grab and drag the image around.







4. To zoom out, continue with these steps:
4. Choose the Zoom tool again (if needed).

5. Press and hold Alt (Windows) or Option (Mac) on your keyboard to change the mouse pointer's magnifying glass, adding a minus sign. That means "zooming out!"
6. Click the mouse to reduce the image in size and decrease the zoom percentage.

You can continue to use the Alt+click or Option+click technique to zoom out, but there is also a shortcut for zooming: press Ctrl+0 or +0. That's the Fit On Screen command that quickly lets you "step back" and view the image as it best fits on the screen.

The Fit On Screen command also appears in the View menu, which you should check out for other handy commands that help set the size of the image you see on the screen. Table 4.1 lists the handy commands found in Photoshop Elements.

► **Table 4.1** Zoom Commands in Photoshop Elements

Command	Keys (Windows)	Keys (Mac)	What It Does
Zoom In	Ctrl+=	 +=	Enlarges the image in the window (but does not change the image's size)
Zoom Out	Ctrl+-	 +-	Reduces the image in the window
Fit On Screen	Ctrl+0	 +0	Zooms the image to fit entirely inside the window
Actual Pixels	Alt+Ctrl+0	 +Option+0	Displays the image on a 1:1 ratio of its pixels to your monitor's pixels.



Note: If you need to zoom in tight on a specific area, select the Zoom tool and then click and drag the mouse over that area. The area you select with the mouse/Zoom tool is then displayed as large as it can be.

Most photo-editing programs also sport a Zoom input box where you can manually enter a zoom percentage, or you can use a slider or preselect zoom percentages from a menu to set the zoom.

No matter how you do it, you use the Zoom tool to make the image appear larger or smaller on the screen. But do remember that this zooming about does not change the image's size, any more than looking through a magnifying glass at an insect changes that insect's size.

"Why Doesn't the Image Appear on My Monitor at 100%?"

Knowing why the image you see on your monitor is so large has to do with the image's *resolution*. The issue is pixels, or those tiny dots that compose digital images. With some images, the pixels are packed in really tight, say 600 or more to the inch. Some images have a lower resolution.

Your computer's monitor has a resolution of either 72 or 96 pixels per inch, depending on whether you have a Mac or PC, respectively. When you display an image taken at a resolution of 600 pixels-per-inch (or dots-per-inch, or dpi) on a monitor that can show only 72 pixels per inch, the result is one huge image. By using the Zoom tool, you can reduce the image's visible size in your photo-editing program, so that you can see it all on the screen at once. This works regardless of the image's resolution.











Rotating Images

There is no rule that says you have to hold a camera level with the ground, though tradition and common sense make people do just that. Still, the camera does have two legitimate orientations: landscape and portrait. A basic photography class teaches you to use the landscape mode for taking pictures of left-right things (such as landscapes) and the portrait mode for taking pictures of up-down things (such as people).

When you take a picture in portrait mode, however, your digital camera probably won't recognize that it's been turned 90 degrees. So when you view the image in your photo-editing program, it appears sideways. The way to get it back to a proper orientation is to rotate it.

Photo-editing programs come with a Rotate tool, but that's primarily used to rotate items in layers for special effects. When it comes to rotating an image from landscape to portrait mode (or vice versa), you'll want to use the traditional Rotate commands found in a menu. In Photoshop Elements, the commands are on the Rotate menu (choose Image > Rotate). The five handiest commands are shown in Table 4.2.

► **Table 4.2** Common Image Rotating Commands

Command	Visual	Transformation
90° Left		
90° Right		
180°		
Flip Horizontal		
Flip Vertical		

Note: To help you remember the difference between Flip Horizontal and Flip Vertical, add the words *around axis* to the command name. The Flip Horizontal command flips the image around a horizontal (left-right) axis. The Flip Vertical command flips the image around a vertical (up-down) axis.



Most photo-editing programs also have a Free Rotate command. Again, that works best for special effects and is not specifically designed to change the orientation of the image you're editing.

For example, you've taken an image in portrait mode, which the camera doesn't understand, so the result in your photo-editing program is shown on its side, as depicted in Figure 4.2. To fix it in Photoshop Elements, you can choose Image > Rotate > 90° Right to display the image in its proper orientation.




Figure 4.2

An image taken in portrait mode, which needs to be rotated

Cropping Portions of Images

Cropping is the official name for what you do when you take a pair of scissors to your photographs. By cropping, you make the image smaller, pull in the sides or top or bottom, eliminate unwanted elements, and reduce the image to what you primarily want the viewer to focus on.

To crop an image, you use the Crop tool , which has a universal icon. You drag the mouse over the image to select the part you want to keep, roping it off from the part you want discarded or cropped away.

To crop an image, follow these steps:

1. Select the Crop tool. In Photoshop Elements, you can press the C key on your keyboard as a shortcut. The mouse changes to the Crop tool icon. The “hot spot” is in the center of the cropping tool.
2. Drag the mouse over the area of your image that you want to keep. This works just like dragging and selecting; start at the upper-left corner and drag the mouse down to the lower-right corner. Don't worry about being precise; you can adjust the crop lines later.

Figure 4.3 shows an image with a chunk selected for cropping. The area to be cropped appears darker than the area that remains. Also notice how the cropped area grows eight tiny handles, on the sides and corners of the cropping area. You can use those handles to fine-tune the cropping area.



Figure 4.3
An area of this image is selected for cropping.

3. Use the handles to refine the area. With the mouse, drag one of the eight handles in or out to resize the cropping region.



Note: Not all images you snap will be perfectly horizontal or vertical. When you crop, some background may still be exposed. To help eliminate that, crop on the *inside* of the area or region you're selecting. The idea is to eliminate all the background.

4. Press Enter to cut the outside, unselected area from the image.
If you change your mind, choose Edit > Undo. Or if you change your mind while cropping, press Esc to cancel the selection.

Details, Details

When you need a closeup of some detail in your image, first use the Zoom tool to zoom in on that detail. Second, crop the image to contain that detail. Third, resize the image to a good size. You can then use both the full image and the detail when trying to sell the product.

Resizing Images

One of the major goofs of folks new to digital photography is not properly sizing their images. A full-size high-resolution image direct from your camera chews up a lot of memory and occupies a goodly chunk of hard-drive space. That's just fine. But you won't be selling many items when your visitors on eBay have to wait 20 minutes for a 17MB graphics file to show up in their web browser. You need to resize the image so that it doesn't consume a lot of space, is therefore quicker to download, and appears in a decent size on their computer monitor.

Resizing is simply the act of reducing the number of pixels long and tall in your image. The end size you want really depends on the destination. I generally recommend a size of between 300 and 400 pixels on the image's long end for e-mail or the Web. Other sources may have other recommendations. If you're saving an image for a particular purpose, check to see what's recommended before you resize.

To resize an image, follow these steps:

1. Choose the Image Resizing command from your photo-editing program. In Photoshop Elements, choose Image > Resize > Image Size to open the Image Size dialog box, shown in Figure 4.4.

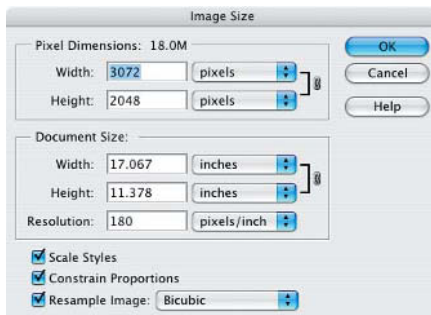


Figure 4.4

Resize the image using this dialog box.

2. Ensure that the image's width and height values are constrained to keep the image from being distorted when it's resized.
3. Enter a new value for the width. For example, if you want to reduce the image width to about 300 pixels, type 300 in the Width box.

When the values are constrained, an equivalent number of pixels automatically appears in the Height box. You need not manually calculate that value.

4. Click OK to close the dialog box and to set the image to the new size.

You'll have to adjust the zoom as the new image appears at the same zoom percentage, but because you reduced the image's size, it's now smaller on the screen.



Note : After reducing the image's size, a good command to choose for viewing the image is Actual Pixels. In Photoshop Elements, choose View > Actual Pixels.

If you're required to size an image based on its file size as opposed to its dimensions, use the values at the top of the Image Size dialog box to help you confirm approximately how much space the image file uses. In Photoshop Elements, for example, it might say "175.8K (was 18.0M)," which means that the image now uses 175KB of disk space whereas the original image was 18MB in size.



Note: Generally speaking, you don't want to use the Resize command to make an image larger. This book recommends taking your pictures at the highest resolution that your digital camera is capable of. When you do that, you'll be *reducing* image size in your photo-editing programs. Although the program can increase the image size, the results are terrible and not the way you want to showcase the stuff you sell.

Golly! I Goofed!

The easiest way to undo a mistake in a photo-editing program is to press Ctrl+Z (Windows) or ⌘+Z (Mac), the Undo keyboard command. This shortcut is common to all computer programs. However, there may be some things that cannot be undone, or perhaps a sequence of things is done but undoing them turns out badly. In that case, the only thing to do is use the Revert command.

The Revert command discards the current document and all its changes and modifications and simply reloads the document you're working on. Any changes made since the document was last saved are gone. Such an act is like starting over afresh, and often it's necessary, which is why most photo-editing programs come with such a command.

In most photo-editing applications, the Revert command is right there on the File menu. In Photoshop Elements, however, choose Edit > Revert To Saved.

Saving in a Specific Image Format

When you're done torturing your image, or even well before things are just as you want, consider saving your image to disk. You can choose from many file formats, and the final format really depends on where your image ends up. For example, if you're saving your images to be used by other applications on your computer, the TIFF file format works well. Printing bureaus also love TIFF, but be sure to check with them to ensure that you get all the tiny, obscure TIFF options set properly.

For the Internet, the best format is JPEG. It saves the image in a manner that preserves all the color and flavor, but allows the image to be compressed to save space.

Note: You want to save your image in a new file; do not overwrite the camera original. Keeping the original is a good thing; see Chapter 7 for more information.



To save your image in a specific format, follow these steps:

1. Choose File > Save As to open the Save As dialog box. The Windows version is shown in Figure 4.5, and the Mac version in Figure 4.6. Both of them look different, but the steps in each are identical.

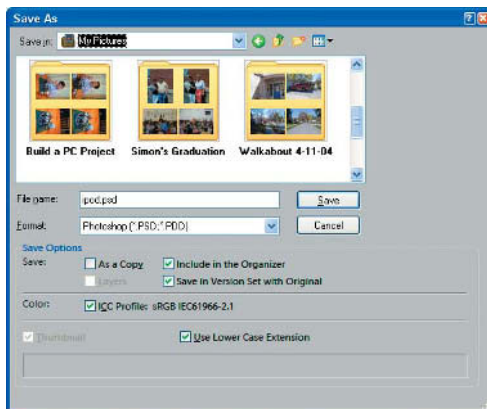


Figure 4.5
The Windows Save As dialog box

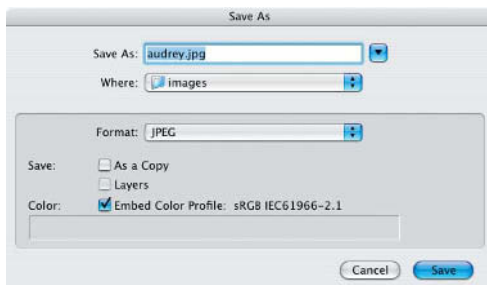


Figure 4.6
The Mac Save As dialog box

2. Set a folder or location in which to save your image file.
The operating system will prefer its own images or the My Pictures folder. It's better to keep together images of the items that you plan to sell, so you'll most likely want to use another folder or create a new folder. Chapter 7 has the details.
3. Name the image. Use a different name, one other than the original camera image. In fact, when your camera is in the habit of giving your images numbers for names, use this opportunity to give your image a nice, short, descriptive name.
4. Choose a format from the Format list. Choose TIFF or JPEG, depending on where the image is ending up.

5. Click the Save button. A dialog box opens, prompting you for further file format options.
6. Enter any format options.

For example, for JPEG, you'll set the quality. High or maximum values are recommended. In Photoshop Elements, a size preview—as well as download time information—is provided at the bottom of the JPEG Options dialog box.

TIFF images also have options, which are set in the TIFF Options dialog box. Most of the time, you can get away with clicking OK, though if you're working with a source that requests certain TIFF options—such as LZW compression—you can set those options in the dialog box.

Remember that as you continue to edit after saving, you're editing the saved file, not the original. This is a good idea; keep the camera original on disk untouched. That way, if you ever really screw up, you can start over again with that image.



Note: As you work, resave your image to disk. Choose File > Save or press Ctrl+S or ⌘+S.

In What Order Should These Tools Be Used?

When you're photo editing, you should do as much image manipulation as you can before you crop, resize, change the resolution, or save your image in another file format.

Remember, the key is information. If you're adjusting color levels or editing your image, you want lots of those juicy pixels to play with. The more the better! Only when you're done with your editing chores should you crop, reduce resolution, and perform other tricks that get rid of all those nice pixels.

Fixing the Color, Tone, and Balance

One of the weaknesses of human eyes is that they interpret almost any light they see as white. On a bright sunny day, inside a classroom, by the fireplace, or at the kitchen table, all that light looks white. In the real world, however, light comes in a spectrum of colors. This is evident when you view your digital images and discover that they're suddenly tinted green or orange. No, there's nothing wrong with your camera; that's just the real color of the light present.

Especially if you're using common lightbulbs in the lamps that are recommended in Chapter 2, you'll soon discover that all your images are cast with a dull orange hue. That's probably not the professional results you were expecting. But fret not. Handy commands are available in your photo-editing software to fix problems with tone, contrast, brightness, and other light issues. These are covered in the sections that follow.

The Nifty Auto Smart Fix Command

Photoshop Elements has one command that does it all. It's *automagic*! Choose Enhance > Auto Smart Fix, or press Ctrl+M (Windows) or ⌘+M (Mac). In a flash, your image is electronically wiped clean of all foul color imbalances, contrast, brightness, or other strange defects of light and mystery. Yes, it's the *magic button* you've been waiting for. (If only such a thing existed to clean up your word processing, eh?)

Yes, there is nothing wrong with this type of quick fix. In fact, only if you really know what you're doing should you mess with any detailed image adjustments.

Then again, sometimes Auto Smart Fix just isn't that smart. Remember that Ctrl+Z (Windows) or ⌘+Z (Mac) is the Undo key. You might want to try some of the effects in the following sections instead of Auto Smart Fix. Picking and choosing which effects to use might render a better end result.

Fixing Off-Color Images

The best way to address issues related to the image's overall color is to set the color balance. This is how you can offset the orange tint generated by household lightbulbs or the greenish tint produced by fluorescent lighting.

For example, suppose you have an image such as the one shown in Figure 4.7. To fix that orange tint in Photoshop Elements, choose Enhance > Auto Color Correction. The orange tint is removed, yielding the result in Figure 4.8.



Figure 4.7
Ugly orange in this image comes from the standard lightbulbs used.



Figure 4.8
The same image as Figure 4.7, but after a quick color correction

Similar commands to Auto Color Correction can be found in other photo-editing programs. The name may be different, but the result is the same.

Note: Using a command such as Auto Color Correction yields a better image than general-purpose commands such as Auto Smart Fix.



Setting the Levels

Unlike color balance, which affects the entire image, levels can be adjusted to affect specific tones, shadows, highlights, or colors in an image. By using a command to “set the levels,” you can adjust specific elements in your image without affecting others. In fact, setting the levels may be all that’s needed to fix a discolored, flat, or just plain wrong-looking image.

To automatically set the levels in Photoshop Elements, choose Enhance > Auto Levels. You’ll notice the image immediately clears up: shadows are dark, highlights are light, and the colors look right.

You can also manually set the levels in Photoshop Elements. Follow these steps:

1. Choose Enhance > Adjust Lighting > Levels to open the Levels dialog box, as shown in Figure 4.9. This dialog box is similar in both Windows and on the Mac.

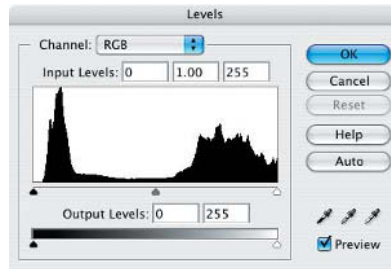


Figure 4.9
Setting individual levels
for an image

2. Ensure that the Preview check box is selected to see the effects your changes have updated in real time on the image you’re editing.
3. Choose RGB from the Channel spin box. RGB affects all colors in the spectrum. You can also choose individual colors to adjust from the Channel spin box.
4. Click the Set Black Point eyedropper. It’s the first eyedropper in the lower-right corner of the Levels dialog box.
5. Locate the darkest spot in your image or the spot where black should be the blackest, and click it. The eyedropper “picks up” that color and immediately shifts the image so that the part you clicked is now the blackest. You’ve just set the black tones for the image.
6. Click to choose the Set White Point eyedropper from the Levels dialog box. It’s the last eyedropper.
7. Click the whitest spot in your image to set the white values.
At this point, the image should look good. You can continue by choosing the Set Gray Point eyedropper and clicking a midtone value in the image. Or you can individually adjust each of the colors present in the Channel spin box. But what you see on the screen should look good now.
8. Click OK to confirm and keep the changes that you’ve made.

Note: You can click the Reset button to undo the changes and continue to mess around in the Levels dialog box. Or you can click Cancel to cancel everything.



Fixing the Brightness and Contrast

Contrary to popular myth, adjusting the brightness on an image after it's taken does not increase the amount of light on the subject. You can do this only when you take the picture, and then it helps to slightly overexpose if you want more light. But in a photo-editing program, brightness and contrast serve two different but often related functions.

Brightness controls the overall light and dark values in an image, as well as the intensity of the colors, making the whole image watery and light or intense and dark. Contrast sets the difference between each light and dark value, to where full contrast yields an image with all-black or all-white parts or an image with no contrast that is a medium muddled gray.

As with other values set in your photo-editing program, the best way to set the brightness and contrast is to have it done automatically. In Photoshop Elements, you do so by choosing Enhance > Auto Contrast.

It's also possible to manually adjust the brightness and contrast. In Photoshop Elements, choosing Enhance > Adjust Lighting > Brightness/Contrast opens the Brightness/Contrast dialog box, as shown in Figure 4.10. With the Preview option checked, you can manually adjust the sliders beneath Brightness and Contrast to see what effect it has on your image.

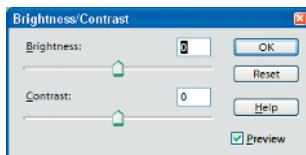


Figure 4.10
Setting brightness and contrast

Note: It's probably a good idea not to mess around in the Brightness/Contrast dialog box. Unless you really know what you're doing, you'll adjust brightness until either all the true darks or all the true whites are gone from the image. Similarly, misadjusting the contrast can remove important detail from an image or transform a good picture into a muddled mess.



Targeting Brightness and Contrast

Of course, brightness and contrast aren't entirely evil. Sometimes you can target which parts of an image to brighten up and fix, while leaving the rest of the image untouched. Indeed, when folks get into trouble with brightness and contrast is when they apply these features to the entire image.

As an example of targeting an effect such as brightness and contrast, take a look at the image in Figure 4.11.



Figure 4.11
The screen on this iPod
doesn't stand out.

It's not really a bad image, but the display on the iPod just blends in with the rest of the device. It doesn't stand out. It needs to be a wee bit brighter and maybe have a teensy bit more contrast. Here's how to do that without affecting the rest of the image:

1. Select the Lasso tool. You can use the Rectangular Marquee tool, but the image is at an angle, and the Rectangular Marquee tool just won't properly grab it. In Photoshop Elements, pressing **L** selects the Lasso tool. Better still, hold the mouse button down on the Lasso tool until a menu appears from which you can select the *Magnetic Lasso* tool.
2. Select the part of the image that you want to modify. Using the Magnetic Lasso tool, click to start your selection, and then move the mouse (don't drag it) to select the part of the image to modify. Click the mouse again to stop selecting.
3. Choose **Enhance > Auto Contrast**. You can also choose **Enhance > Adjust Lighting > Brightness/Contrast** and then use the Brightness/Contrast dialog box to fix the selected area. Only the part of the image you selected is fixed, as shown in Figure 4.12.



Figure 4.12
The screen stands out now.

4. Press **Ctrl+D** or **⌘+D** to deselect and remove the selection.

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Sharpening the Focus

Ideally you want to ensure that the image you snapped was in focus. This is that extra care this book recommends you take before the image is snapped: check the focus. But even then, nature and the elements might be working against you. Perhaps the best shot you got that day was slightly out of focus. Or maybe you want to know a photographer's secret about how to make a good picture look even better. Then what you need to know about is the Sharpen filters in Photoshop Elements.

The filters are what make Photoshop Elements, and its big brother Photoshop, famous. By using the power of the computer, the filters can magically transform an image from one thing to another, making it look as if you've slaved for hours to get things just right. Sneaky, yes. But very practical.

So here's a little trick that really helps boost the clarity and crispness of an image. It's the Sharpen filter that takes some of the blur from an image and can really make it pop.

To best witness the Sharpen filter in action, open an image that has some detail to it. Any product shot will do. A shot of some postage stamps was used for an example in Figures 4.13 and 4.14.

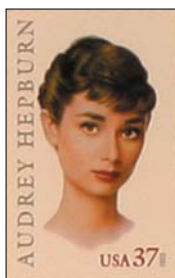


Figure 4.13
Zoomed-in original
camera image



Figure 4.14
The same image as Fig-
ure 4.13, but after using
the Sharpen filter

Choose Filter > Sharpen > Sharpen. Almost instantly, the image clears up and crystallizes. *It just looks better!* Figures 4.13 and 4.14 are zoomed in so that you can see the detail. But when seen even at regular size on the monitor, the image just pops.



Note: Some cameras have a built-in Auto Sharpen feature. If possible, try to disable it. The best time to sharpen is when you're editing an image in a photo-editing program, which gives you more control and options than the software included in your camera.

Blurring Stuff You Don't Want Focused

Just as most photo-editing programs have a Sharpen filter, they also sport a Blur filter. That's right: a Blur filter can be applied to areas of a photograph that you want deliberately out of focus.

Normally you can use the depth of field in the camera to set what you want in focus or out of focus. But that may not be practical in all situations, or the conditions under which the photograph is taken may not lend themselves to put certain objects out of focus. Regardless, you can use your imaging software to add the visual fuzz.

In Photoshop Elements, you choose Filter > Blur > Gaussian Blur. The Gaussian Blur filter uses the mathematical properties of the bell curve to soften the colors and tones in an image or in the selected portion of an image. Follow these steps to apply a Gaussian Blur to a specific part of your image:

1. Select the item that you *do not* want blurred. Use any of the selection tools available: Rectangular Marquee, Lasso, Magnetic Lasso. Select only the object that you want to keep sharp and in focus.



Note: If you make a mistake and select the wrong thing, press **Ctrl+D** or **⌘+D** to remove the selection and start over.

2. Choose Select > Inverse to deselect the object you've chosen and that you want in focus. This also selects everything else instead—what you want to blur.
3. Choose Filter > Blur > Gaussian Blur to open the Gaussian Blur dialog box, which is shown in Figure 4.15. This wonderful dialog box sports a handy preview window. You can use the + or – controls to zoom in or out of the preview window. You can also use the mouse inside the preview window to help drag the image about. Be sure that the Preview box is checked!
4. Adjust the slider to increase or decrease the blurriness of the selected area. The farther you drag the slider to the right, the blurrier things become. Use the preview window to check your work.
5. Click OK when the blurriness is to your satisfaction.

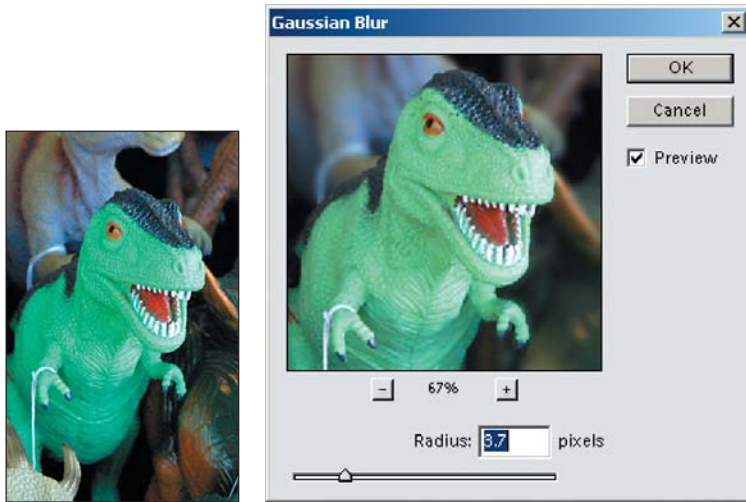


Figure 4.15 You can apply the Gaussian Blur to make portions of your image appear out of focus, so that your main image stands out.

In Figure 4.16, you see how the Gaussian Blur effect was applied to help draw focus to the blocks that spell out a message. Only a tiny amount of blur was required to direct focus away from the other blocks.



Figure 4.16 A modicum of blur helps set the focus for this image.

You'll also note that the blocks in Figure 4.16 use humor to help sell. That would almost be enough, but blurring the unimportant blocks helps to drive the message home even more.

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Bye-Bye Background

A grand trick to pull is to yank an object from its environment and render it by itself. Normally, you set such an object on an infinite horizon. But sometimes that's just not practical, especially for large objects. The trick is to use photo-editing software to eliminate or obscure the background. You can then ensure that focus is on the object itself and not on its environment.

As an example, Figure 4.17 shows a lamp in an environment that's not going to help it sell one iota. Suppose it weren't possible to put the lamp on an infinite horizon or in any other, better location. Therefore, the solution is to use the photo-editing program to remove the background.



Figure 4.17
The shot of this lamp is ruined by the busy environment.

The key here is to properly use the photo-editing software's selection tools to remove the background. That does require some effort.

You'll probably use a combination of tools to select and eliminate large areas. One trick to try is the Magic Wand tool. Use it to select parts of the background that have similar color or tone. You can adjust the tolerance on the toolbar. Plus you can extend the selection to similarly colored areas of the image by choosing **Select > Similar**.

Another tool to use is the Eraser. You'll probably want to set the Eraser very fine and use the Zoom tool to get in close and erase parts of the background in tight areas.

Note: Save your work often as you go about removing the background!



After some time and elbow grease, you'll eventually end up with the same object but no background, as shown in Figure 4.18. It may not be as simple and effortless as setting up the infinite horizon, but at times it's often the only way to get rid of a pesky background.



Figure 4.18
The same shot as
Figure 4.17, but with the
background removed

Note: You can save some time in advance when you need to use this trick by removing as many obstacles as possible. For example, in Figure 4.17, you can remove the chair and place mat, making it easier to select the lamp and delete the background. When the background is of a consistent color, it's easier to select. But it takes some experience to recognize this. Remember, anything that can be done ahead of time to save you from toiling in a photo-editing program is a good thing.



Compositing an Image

Artificially doctoring your images, especially the stuff you sell, is an official no-no. Not only does the buyer trust that you'll accurately represent your product, but laws just about everywhere are designed to protect the buyer from outright fraud. So while your

photo-editing program might fully and easily be able to mask that chip in your photograph of Grandma's china, it's something you shouldn't attempt.

In one area, however, you might want to consider using a bit more of the power of your photo-editing program. The idea here isn't to fool the buyer, but rather to underscore this book's main theme, which is making your product look good. That is, creating a composite image.

What Is a Composite Image?

A composite is like a special effect in a movie. It's combining two separate images to make a final shot. This comes into play for products you sell when you're showing images on screens or monitors. The object with the screen is photographed first, and then the monitor is photographed separately. Finally, the two images are combined, or composited, one atop the other, to make the end result.

Compositing is necessary because monitors, screens, TVs, and LCDs generate light. They are a *light source*. Not only that, TV screens and computer CRT monitors flicker. Your eye won't pick up the flicker because of a phenomenon known as *persistence of vision*, but an unblinking camera notices the flicker without discretion. This explains why some photographs you have of TV sets, computer monitors, or even digital clocks show only part of the image on the screen.

To get things right and properly show the image, you can either show the device with its monitor turned off—and, indeed, many advertisements do show TVs and computers that way—or you can take the extra step and composite the image. You take one picture of the object with the screen off. Then you take another picture just to capture the screen. The two are then combined, or composited, inside your photo-editing program.

The result of compositing an image is a product shot that looks natural. Its lighting is fine because the object's light source was turned off. And the image appears fine because that shot was taken separately. The buyer never needs to know, and the image isn't a scam because nothing was really “fixed” other than properly rendering the shot the way the eye normally sees things.



Note: Even though compositing is a common practice, it is fraud to misrepresent your product. This chapter's example shows you how to composite a shot to remove the flicker that occurs when you take a photograph of a monitor on a *fully functioning* video camera.

Taking the Product Shot

Your first step is to take a photograph of the object as you normally would. In Figure 4.19, the camcorder is set up just as any other product shot would be composed. An infinite horizon is used, and the lighting is diffused and from the back left. Notice that the camera's preview screen is open and ready for use—but there is no image. That's important. For the initial product shot, do not show an image.



Figure 4.19
The LCD screen is off for this initial product shot.

Notice also that the light source in Figure 4.19 is *behind* the product. Because it's diffused, the light is nice and soft and fills in the cracks and shadows, helping to define the camcorder. But also by placing the light behind the object, you immediately lose any chance of having an ugly reflection on the monitor.

Note: If you do end up with a reflection on the screen, use the techniques described elsewhere in this book to remove the reflection.



Capturing the Screen Image

After capturing the product, the next step is to capture the image that would normally appear on the screen.

Note: Nothing must move between the shots!



Ensure that the camera is tightly on the tripod so that the camera does not move. Then carefully turn on the item or do whatever is necessary to get the image up on the screen or monitor. Don't move anything!

Back at the camera, you want to adjust the exposure for the screen, not the entire image. This takes some thinking, so pay attention! LCD screens don't require much extra exposure time, but still consider doing an exposure longer than $\frac{1}{30}$ second or so. CRT monitors and televisions require at least a one-second exposure to get their image to

display properly. When in doubt, go for that long exposure! Remember, more information is better! Lots of bits!



Note: When taking a shot of a TV, try to find an image that isn't rapidly changing. Because the exposure time is longer, an action sequence will appear mushy when you use a long exposure. Instead, wait for a slow part of a program or until there is a landscape shot or something that will stay around for a few moments. Do not use the pause button on your VCR or DVD either, as such images appear unrealistically artificial.

You might also want to open the aperture just one stop to slightly overexpose the image. So to review: Set the shutter speed as described, depending on the image source. Then, open the aperture one stop, for example, from $f/11$ to $f/8$. You may have to set your camera on full manual mode for this, but the results will be worth it.

In Figure 4.20, you see the same setup as for Figure 4.19, but with the camcorder's LCD on. Note how the image is overexposed compared with Figure 4.19? This is because the image is being exposed for the LCD, not the entire camera. Otherwise, the shot is the same, the camera is in the same position with the same framing, and the lighting is the same as in Figure 4.19.



Figure 4.20
This photograph is exposed to best capture the image on the LCD screen.



Note: Consider taking a few shots at different exposures just to be sure that you've properly captured the image. Doing so now saves you from having to re-create the image later if you aren't happy with the images.

Creating the Final Result

When you have both the product shot and the monitor or screen image shot, you're ready to use your photo-editing software to composite them. This is really an easy and amazing thing to do. The following is an overview, assuming that Photo 1 is the product image and Photo 2 was exposed to capture the monitor or screen.

1. Open Photo 2 in your photo-editing application. Start with the image that is properly exposed to capture the monitor or screen.
2. Choose the Polygonal Lasso or Magnetic Lasso tool.
3. Select the monitor or screen images. If you don't get all of the screen on the first try, press $\text{⌘}+\text{D}$ or $\text{Ctrl}+\text{D}$ to unselect, and start over.
4. When you're happy with the selection, choose **Select > Feather** to open the Feather Selection dialog box, as shown in Figure 4.21.



Figure 4.21

Set a feather radius of 10 pixels here.

5. Set Feather Radius to 10 pixels. Feathering causes the selection's edges to become "fuzzy," which helps it better match when pasted into the product photograph. In Figure 4.22, you see the copied selection from Figure 4.20. Notice how the edges are fuzzy? That's feathering in action.



Figure 4.22

The copied image, with feathered edges

6. Click OK to feather the selection.
7. Choose **Edit > Copy** to copy the selected portion of the image.
8. Open Photo 1. This is the image that you took of the product with the screen or monitor off.
9. Choose **Edit > Paste** to paste in the monitor from the previous image. In Photoshop Elements, the pasted image appears in a new layer.
10. Use the Move tool to position the pasted image.

Note: You might want to use the Zoom tool to zoom in on the image, ensuring that you position things properly.



Figure 4.23 shows the end result. It's a combination of what you see in Figures 4.19 and 4.22, carefully pasted and merged together. Such an image can only be made through compositing.



Figure 4.23 The final, composited image

- 11.** Save the file in the photo editor's native format. In Photoshop Elements, choose File > Save As. Use the Photoshop file format (PSD). Similarly, in whatever photo editor you're using, use that same application's format to save the image. This preserves the layers so that you can go back and reedit the image later, if needed.
- 12.** Choose Layer > Flatten Image. You need to collapse the layers in your photo-editing program so that you can save it in the JPEG format for the Web. (If you forget this step, most good photo editors will remind you when you save, either as you save or by not letting you save in the JPEG format.)
- 13.** Save the image for the Web.

See the section "Resizing Images" earlier in this chapter for how to save your images for the Web. You can now use your composited image to help sell the product, looking better than it would with the monitor or screen turned off.

Creating a Watermark

Traditionally, a watermark was part of the paper. (You remember paper?) Many of the fancier papers held an embedded image, one that you couldn't see when the paper was lying flat, but when held up to the light, the watermark image was visible. The watermark was a way of proving that the document was printed on high-quality paper, but also confirmed that the person was writing on the "right" side of the paper.

Currently, the rage in watermarks is with money; hold a crisp new bill up to the light, and you can see an image that isn't visible otherwise. Governments do this because watermarks are difficult to photocopy. In a similar manner, you can add watermarks to your images to help prevent others from using them.

The following sections show you how to create various watermarks for your images. Remember that any image on the Internet can be easily downloaded and used by someone else—despite being illegal. By adding a watermark to your images, you can help discourage copying, as well as ensure that those images you see elsewhere were first created by you.

eBay's Watermark Feature

eBay offers a watermarking service for your pictures, either using the eBay camera image watermark, which appears in the lower-right corner of your image, or using your eBay user ID.

Currently, eBay does not charge for adding the watermarking feature to your images, though remember that eBay does charge you extra for more than one image per item.

Of course, you might want to provide a more personal watermark for your image, one that you can use not only on eBay but anywhere on the Internet you put your image. Take a look at how to create your own in the following sections.

Creating a Simple Text Watermark

In Adobe Photoshop Elements, follow these steps to produce a simple text watermark on your images.

1. Open and prepare the image. Work with the image as necessary, described elsewhere in this chapter. The image should be all fixed up, cropped, resized, color corrected, and have all other photo-editing activities completed. In fact, you might have already even saved the image to disk. That's fine. Watermarking should be the last step.
2. Select the Text tool. In Photoshop Elements, the shortcut here is to press the T key. You'll see things change in Elements, reflecting the Text tool's options, as shown in Figure 4.24. Pay attention to the Font, Size, and Alignment buttons on the toolbar.

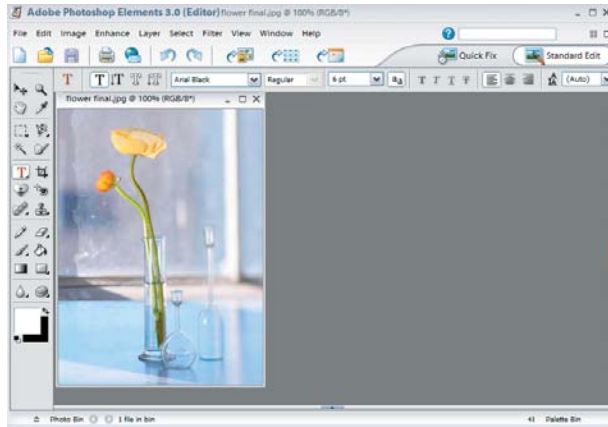



Figure 4.24
Note the Text tool options on the toolbar.

3. Choose white as the Text tool's foreground color. The quickest way to do this in Photoshop Elements is to press **D** and then **X** on the keyboard. Pressing **D** sets the default colors of black foreground and white background. Pressing **X** then switches them.
4. Click in the bottom center of the image to set the starting point for your watermark text.
5. Type the watermark text. If the text is too big or too tiny, press the Backspace key to back up and erase, or highlight the text to make changes as you would in any text-editing software, and then choose a larger text size from the toolbar. Likewise, if the font isn't to your liking, press the Backspace key to erase and then choose a new font to start over.
6. When you finish typing the watermark, click the Move tool . It's in the top-left column of the tool palette. By selecting this tool, you exit text-typing mode.



Note: If you want to do something extra fancy here, you can emboss your text. This gives the watermark more of a three-dimensional look, though it works best on larger text. To emboss the text, choose **Filter > Stylize > Emboss** to open the Emboss dialog box. Click **OK** to simplify the type (but be aware that this makes the type uneditable in the future). Then click **OK** after you've messed around with the Emboss dialog box.

7. Position the watermark. You can use the mouse and the Move tool or the arrow keys on your keyboard for more precise movement. You can place the watermark anywhere in the image, though traditionally it goes in the lower-right corner, but not too close to the image's edges.

Note: Some folks put the watermark right in the center of the image, over the object being photographed. This is a sure-fire way to help prevent image theft, but such a move also detracts greatly from the quality of the image.



8. Choose Windows > Layers to display the Layers palette.
9. Choose the layer with your watermark text in it. The layer in the Figure 4.25 is labeled “Watermark,” which is also the white text that you can see over the image in Figure 4.20.

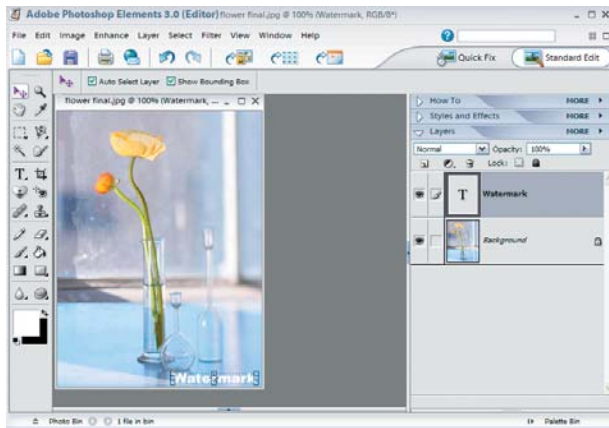


Figure 4.25
The watermark is positioned and ready to be made semitransparent.

10. Set the opacity for the watermark’s layer. Use the slider in the Layers palette to adjust the opacity of the watermark layer down to about 25 percent—or whatever makes the watermark still visible but not obnoxiously so. (For some images, depending on the background, you may have to adjust the slider to values above 50 percent.)
11. Flatten the image. JPEG images are composed of one layer, but Photoshop Elements uses two layers to add text to an image. Therefore, before you save, you need to flatten the image.

Note: At this point, you might want to save the image in the native Photoshop Elements format, just so you can preserve the second layer with the watermark. That way you can go back and re-edit the watermark’s text if you like. Remember that this would be a *third* graphics file format in which to save the image: the camera’s original, the JPEG for the Internet, plus the Photoshop Elements file format for editing the watermark.



To flatten the image, click to select the Background layer in the Layers palette. Then click the More button on the Layers tab to see a special pop-up menu. Choose the Flatten Image command from that menu.

12. Save the JPEG file back to disk. The new copy of the image on disk now has the watermark.

Using Your Company Logo As a Watermark

Adobe Photoshop Elements is up to the task when you'd rather use a graphic image, such as your corporate logo, instead of text as a watermark. All you need to do is open the corporate logo or other graphic file in Elements. Copy the image, or select and copy the portion that you want to use.

For example, if the background is white, select the background with the Magic Wand tool. Then choose Select > Inverse, which selects everything in the image but the background. Choose Edit > Copy to copy the desired logo. You can then close the image window.

Next, open the product image in which you want to create the watermark. Paste in the logo by choosing Edit > Paste. Resize the logo watermark and reposition it as necessary.

At this point, you can continue with steps 8 through 12 in the previous section to create the watermark. You can see a sample of a logo watermark in Figure 4.26.

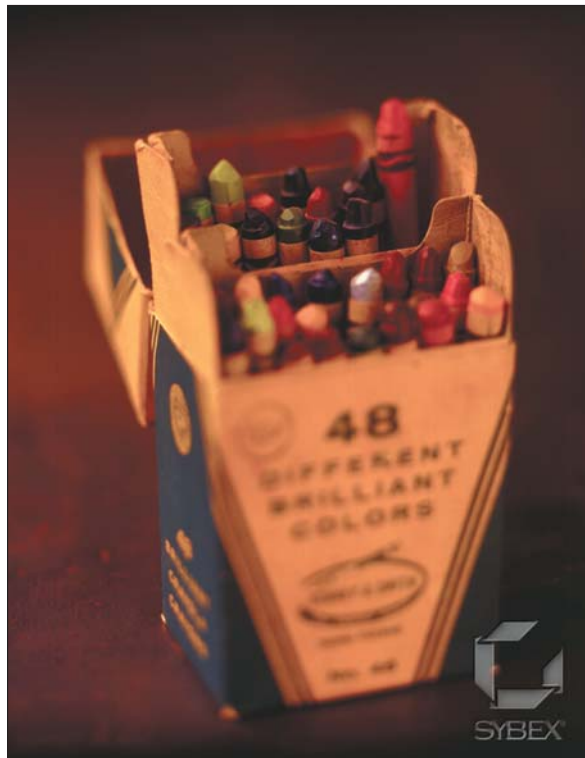


Figure 4.26
An example of a logo watermark on a photo

Using a Digital Watermark

You'll note that Photoshop Elements refers to a special digital watermark called Digimark. This is a special "invisible" watermarking technology marketed by an outfit called Digital Marketing, Inc. (www.digimark.com). This is a professional service, and they charge money for digitally encoding your images. It is not a part of the Photoshop Elements program. For now, or until your images become world famous, consider using the watermarking techniques described in this book before you're making enough money to do things with Digimark.



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Creating Images with the Subjective Approach

One person's junk is another's treasure. What may look to you like an old chunk of metal is in fact a heavy, antique brass door hinge. Yet only when the old chunk of metal is put into context can you properly recognize and appreciate its value.

The best way to showcase unfamiliar objects is to photograph them in context, using the subjective approach. Placing a common object into context also helps it look good. A bowl. A glass. Cuff links. An espresso machine. Putting those objects in context builds an association; the image becomes part of a fantasy that helps the potential buyer emotionally connect with the object.

5

In this Chapter

- Understanding the subjective approach
- Shooting small items: jewelry
- Setting up for medium-sized objects
- Photographing larger objects subjectively

Using the Subjective Approach

The bottom line is sales: you want to sell something. This involves having something to sell, but it also requires an important and often missing piece: *the buyer*. How much do you know about the buyer? The more you know, the easier it is to sell them something.

Begin by asking questions. What does the buyer want? Why do they want it? What need does it fill? The more you know about your buyer, the better you can deliver what the buyer wants. Even though you cannot possibly get into the buyer's head, the point here is to try. Put yourself in the buyer's mood, and then craft a photograph to sell to that mood.

Ask yourself, is the buyer going to be familiar with this object? If not, it helps to put that object in a context where it will be familiar. For example, not everyone is familiar with a napkin ring or knows what it does. A napkin ring might look like jewelry or artwork to such a person. The sense of scale or perspective might be lost, and the buyer might need to know how large the piece is. Rather than photograph the ring on a Formica countertop next to a ruler, *put it context*.

When the buyer is familiar with an object—say, a set of glassware, dishes, or something else commonly used—create a fantasy for that buyer. Try to guess who they are and when they'll be using the item. In your photograph, build a moment for the buyer to soak in. A set of espresso glasses is just more glassware to look at on eBay. But an image of a glass with a steaming cup of espresso perhaps sitting by a biscotti or the morning paper evokes a time and place. It builds a connection. The buyer thinks, "That could be me enjoying that fine sip of espresso some morning."

When the object is dull, give it a life; place dull and ordinary objects where you think the buyer would find themselves comfortable. To help build that environment, keep asking questions: Who will buy this? How do they see themselves using this? Where would they place it? What kind of fantasy can I build for this person? Answer those questions and you'll set the perfect subjective environment for not only the item you're photographing but for the buyer as well.

Shooting Small Objects

Small objects are some of the most difficult things to photograph. Even the professional product photographer has problems taking pictures of teensy, tiny things. You will as well, so the more you know about the problems beforehand, the easier you can deal with them. But be aware that it's going to take time and patience to do things properly.

Of the many challenges you'll encounter when photographing jewelry, the first is lighting. You'll need a lot of light, not only because the object is small, but because of reflections. For example, cut gems have many facets and each facet reflects light from a different direction. No one wants a dark spot on any face of a gem.

Another tough thing is moving the tiny objects. For that, you'll need a pair of tweezers or often a toothpick to gently and slightly move the itty-bitsy objects into proper position.

Finally, the camera must be up to the task. What you really need is a *macro lens*, or one that has a focal range that's only inches before the camera. (Many zoom lenses have macro ability.)

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If you're up to the task, further be aware that most small objects, especially jewelry, should really be photographed using the subjective approach. The following sections show several examples, but feel free to experiment. Try new things. See what works and what doesn't, and your own taste as well as how you perceive the buyer, will be the judge here.

Above all, keep at it. Don't give up easily, but don't waste too much time trying to get the effect you want. The information in the sections that follow will be of help. Eventually, with care and practice, you'll take that shot that sells.

Preparing an Environment for Jewelry

When you think of jewelry, you think of elegance, wealth and, above all, beauty. Your photograph must enhance and enforce these attributes, beyond just properly capturing the object itself. Because of this, all jewelry should be photographed using the subjective approach.

Selecting the proper background is of prime importance. You want to avoid the plain and the stark. Instead, choose something warm and elegant. Avoid a background that overpowers the image. For example, you don't want a powerful background pattern to literally swallow a tiny pair of earrings. Avoid the ugly and cheesy as well, such as the poor example in Figure 5.1.



Figure 5.1 Bad environment. Bad lighting. Bad shot.

In Figure 5.1, you see a bracelet that looks as if it were literally dropped on a tabletop. The background looks cheap, like one of those ugly, utilitarian folding tables you'd find at a rummage sale. Ugly. Ugly. Ugly. Not only that, the picture was taken using a flash, and so what harsh shadows there are don't help define the image. Like a cheap bracelet sold at a yard sale, don't expect to make much money with the photograph shown in Figure 5.1.

Backgrounds can come in many shapes and sizes. While you want to avoid something ugly and non-flattering to the jewelry, you should feel free to experiment with different backgrounds; sometimes the craziest ideas work best. For example, in Figure 5.2, an orange necklace is positioned on a piece of slate. The image could have been taken outside on an overcast day or in a studio with diffused lights.



Figure 5.2
This warm necklace isn't lost in the cool background.

True, the background in Figure 5.2 is cold. But yet the necklace is bright orange. A warm background in that case might overwhelm the viewer, or it could detract from the necklace. Placing the necklace on the cool, gray slate lets its natural warmth come through. And the flat of the slate contrasts with the beads in the necklace, helping to reinforce their shape.

Elegant materials also work well for the background. Silks, satins, velvets—all in warm colors and arranged well can really help offset jewelry in a stunning way. But most photographers take that safe route. As an alternative, and just to be a little crazy and different, consider something outrageous to help make your jewelry stand out.

Figure 5.3 was taken with a background discovered at an art store. Blue and green go together (just look at the horizon). The blue turquoise in the necklace works well against the textured green background. That background is dried grass that comes on special paper and is available in any art supply store. Not only does the color help showcase the turquoise, it adds a contrasting texture to the stones, reinforcing their smoothness.



Figure 5.3
A wild concept: a turquoise necklace on dried grass

Beyond the unique background material, the necklace was photographed from a higher angle so that you can appreciate its shape and design. It's laid out in a kidney-shaped pattern, which is more interesting than the traditional oval. The lighting is natural, through the windows, which are reflected in the stones. Do note that the windows were draped with a shower curtain liner to help diffuse the light and spread it evenly about the necklace.

The same background and effect used in Figure 5.3 is also used in Figure 5.4 to help sell a bracelet. In fact, you could set a whole jewelry collection against the same background, which not only is unique but would help identify buyers with your jewelry store on eBay.



Figure 5.4
A fun way to showcase a bracelet

Working with Small Jewelry

As the jewelry gets smaller, don't make the mistake of overwhelming the buyer with your subjective environment. The dried-grass paper and stone used in the previous section are fine for larger pieces. But when you get down to the tiny stuff, such as backgrounds overwhelm things such as rings and pins, literally swallowing them up. Even so, the idea is still to convey a sense of elegance and evoke the kind of mood necessary for selling the jewelry.



Note: Don't overwhelm the buyer! Your photograph merely provides the sparkle on the shine that's already present in the jewelry itself.

Figure 5.5 shows two small pins or brooches. The background is simply a piece of red silk, red being a warm color. The lighting is diffused so there are really no shadows, which helps eliminate any starkness. And the camera is very close, using a macro lens to keep close items in focus.



Figure 5.5 A butterfly pin and a shoe pin



Note: Silver and red make a powerful combination, as do gold and black.

In Figure 5.6, a pair of rings is set on a sheet of white plastic. You'll note that the white plastic reflects the ring somewhat, which makes the shot more interesting than if a nonreflective surface had been used.



Figure 5.6
Rings up close with dif-
fused light

The lighting in Figure 5.6 is soft, diffused to the point where there are no shadows. In fact, such a setup could be taken under low-light situations, which means the image might have been exposed for 1 or 2 seconds. Also, the depth of field is set quite shallow, highlighting the rings themselves and obscuring the background.

The simple white environment might be considered cold, yet it meshes well with the simple designs on the rings themselves. You could imagine that a person wanting a thick, silver ring with a basic design doesn't want their life filled with complication anyway, hence the plain nature of the photograph. Yet it still is a subjective environment.

Finally, in Figure 5.6, notice how the rings are positioned. The one on top is angled perfectly so that you get an idea of the shape and depth. There is no need to do this with the bottom ring; the shape is automatically assumed to be identical to the top ring. When showing two identical objects in this manner, it does help to have them both oriented differently.

Note: Avoid the temptation to have someone *wearing* the jewelry. To do such a thing properly, you must hire a professional jewelry model, and they don't come cheap. Therefore, don't waste your time using real humans to showcase your jewelry on eBay.



Don't be afraid to have fun with the jewelry and indeed with all your product shots. Some of the latest trends in professional photography involve lots of "thinking outside the box." New and unusual things are being tried all the time, and oftentimes it takes no effort to employ something new or unusual—just a trip to the art supply store.

Midsized Objects (Smaller Than a Breadbox)

A whole class of objects are hand-sized, or designed to be picked up and used. These include anything you hold or can hold—dishes, cups, glasses, but also the various knickknacks, statuettes, and other small objects. They're all photographed in much the same way. The only difference, as far as the subjective approach is concerned, is into which environment you place the objects. Or, to put it another way, how to use the environment to help reinforce that emotional connection with the buyer.

The subjective approach doesn't imply realism; it merely suggests an environment that helps to showcase what you're selling. It can be realistic, or it can be a fantasy, as shown in this section's examples.

Incorporating Fantasy Environments

A cup is a cup is a cup is a cup, right? You've seen one, you've seen them all? That might be what the buyer is thinking, but as the seller you can craft a picture that properly evokes an image in the buyer's mind. Think cup, think *drink*. Making that connection helps lead to the sale because you're telling that buyer that your coffee cup will better suit their caffeinated beverage fix than the other guy's boring coffee cup picture.

The coffee cup in Figure 5.7 is really nondescript. Honestly, there is nothing special about the cup itself, but can you see how that's not entirely true of the image? That photograph is designed to sell by appealing to the coffee drinker's soul.



Figure 5.7
Now *that* is a cup of Joe.

The camera is set up properly in Figure 5.7 to capture the cup's shape. The angle is high so that you get a feel for the circular cup. The cup's handle is set perpendicular so that it's readable as well. The lighting is all natural, coming through the windows. It's Mr. Sun! But our Mr. Sun is also being diffused, thanks to a shower curtain liner over the window.

Rather than set the cup on a boring old tabletop, a special wrapping paper design was chosen just for fun, but also because it works well; the colors balance perfectly with the coffee cup's color, and the dots help reinforce the shape.

Finally, there are the coffee beans. Sure, the cup could have been filled with coffee. But how do you make that look hot? Rather than worry about capturing the steam, or—heaven forbid—the flavor, raw coffee beans were used. The beans were coated with some olive oil to give them a shine and also imply richness. (The beans are “wet,” and coffee is wet, not dry.)

The spoon provides the final kicker, enticing the buyer to want to pick up that spoon and dig into those beans! It's a simple shot, but those extra items—the wrapping paper, beans, and spoon—help you sell more than just the coffee cup. You sell a feeling; you sell a drink.

Photographing Steam

Here is one simple piece of advice for photographing steam: don't even try.

It makes sense to get some steam in an image, for example, to show that a cup of coffee is really hot or perhaps to show a clothing steamer or other gizmo that produces steam. The reality is something else.

Steam is composed of water, which is transparent. It's very difficult to light. Steam is most visible with a dark background, and that doesn't always work with the objects you're photographing. Indeed, sometimes it can take a professional photographer days to get the lighting set properly to capture steam in an image. Often the steam you see in a picture was digitally added later—again by a professional.

On the other hand, sometimes you can be lucky and capture that steaming cup of something hot or steam being ejected from a hot iron without even trying. If you can do it, give yourself a cookie. Otherwise, there are no simple tricks and no soothing words of advice, other than *good luck!*

Figure 5.8 does for tea what Figure 5.7 does for coffee. It evokes a feeling or a time of day, and it invites the buyer to have a deep sip of hot tea from that particular cup. After all, the real purpose is to sell the teacup.



Figure 5.8
Sit back, relax, and enjoy
this cup of tea.

When comparing Figures 5.7 and 5.8, note that the cup in Figure 5.8 is far more elegant than the standard coffee cup in Figure 5.7. Because of this, the camera angle is lower to showcase the design around the edge of the cup, which is one of the cup's features and selling points. Yet the camera angle is still just high enough that you can appreciate the round shape of the cup. It has depth. Even more enticing, the angle is just barely high enough that you can perceive the tea. Notice how the color of the tea nicely matches the gold in the cup and saucer.

Just as the coffee cup shot has its beans, the teacup image uses a spent tea bag and crumpled wrapper. The effect is that the tea is prepared, and the viewer is invited to have a sip. It also helps reinforce that the liquid in the cup is tea and not rusty water or flat beer.

Beyond the low camera angle, the lighting in this shot is completely natural. But what you cannot tell is that it was a very low-light situation. To get the proper exposure, the shutter speed was set to 8 seconds. That allowed enough light in to expose the image without having to ruin the effect of the natural light in the room.

Note also that the depth of field is shallow for the picture, utterly obscuring the background.

Finally, the teacup is set on a mirror that perfectly reflects its beauty, which is like getting two images instead of one. It's also an example of finding a unique material

on which to set an object. But notice how the mirror reflects only the teacup and not anything else that might prove distracting.

Adding a little environment to an image can help the buyer set up how they'll use the object in their head. Figures 5.7 and 5.8 are primarily fantasy environments, which help reinforce the object being sold without subtracting from it. In Figures 5.9 and 5.10 (in the next section), the environment becomes more natural and realistic.

Using Realistic Environments

For more familiar, practical objects, a fantasy environment may not help as much as it distracts. Sometimes leaving an object in its found environment is best. But you must be careful not to include too much environment, or you'll overwhelm the buyer. This section contains a few examples for your rumination.

In Figure 5.9, the salt-and-pepper shakers are on a dining room table. Although you could build a complex tableau around them, including perhaps a steaming baked potato or elaborate table centerpiece, such items would most likely pull the buyer's concentration away from the salt-and-pepper shakers themselves. In this case, all that's needed is that surface, which the buyer can assume to be a kitchen tabletop.



Figure 5.9
A pair of salt-and-pepper shakers

The lighting in Figure 5.9 is natural, coming right in through the kitchen window. But notice how the objects were set so that the light helps define their outline; the light comes from the right-rear side. If the same image were shot from the right, the light might just glare off the objects.

The camera angle and zoom are set in Figure 5.9 so that no distracting items appear in the background. That keeps the focus on the salt-and-pepper shakers, but yet still puts them in an environment. The wooden tabletop could be the buyer's tabletop. It's subtle.

Similar to Figure 5.9, Figure 5.10 shows a simple setup that effectively uses a tabletop to evoke a feeling and makes a connection with the buyer. In this case, however, the glass is partially filled with wine, and a wine bottle appears in the background.



Figure 5.10
 An inviting glass of vino

As with the shots of the coffee and tea cups (Figures 5.7 and 5.8, shown earlier), the angle in Figure 5.10 is high, which lets you value the shape of the wineglass. The light is natural, from a side window that's been diffused with a shower curtain liner. The depth of field is set so that the wineglass is in focus, but the wine bottle is not.

Note: Remember that there isn't really a need to show the entire lot, especially when the lot consists of multiple items. In Figure 5.10, you only need one wineglass, but the photographer/merchant might be trying to sell 24 of those glasses.



Notice also that Figure 5.10 really isn't that busy. Sure, you could have gone nuts perhaps with grapes or a cornucopia, but keep in mind how such stuff overwhelms an image. No, all that's needed is just the wine in the glass. In fact, this is most likely one of a set of glasses for sale, but only one needs to be shown to help drive the sale home. Remember: less is more.

If you'd rather have more detail in the picture, be certain that the detail helps to reinforce the image and not detract. For example, take a look at the eggcups shown in Figure 5.11. The environment is now fading from the realistic one used for Figures 5.9 and 5.10 and borders on the fantasy environment used earlier in this chapter.



Figure 5.11
Eggcups in a borderline
realistic/fantasy environment

The shot in Figure 5.11 isn't really that complicated. The two eggcups are set up, one behind the other as opposed to side by side. This, combined with the wide-open aperture, adds depth to the photograph and keeps it interesting. It's also another example of "thinking outside the box"; most eBay images would have shown the eggcups side by side or would have included all 12 in the set!

The dried flowers, spoon, napkin, and tablecloth help bring out the warm tans and browns of the eggcups. They also help evoke a feeling and set a mood. You'll notice that even though the cups are used for food, there isn't any food in the image. Instead, a comic touch was added by placing an alabaster egg in one of the cups. Beyond being funny, that alabaster egg brings an elegant mood to the photo. Yet it also shows someone who might not immediately recognize the eggcups that they are, indeed, eggcups.

Figure 5.11 is also a great example of using natural, but diffused, light from behind an object. The shutter speed was set long to ensure that enough light was available to capture the image.

Figure 5.12 illustrates the same type of simple elegance as found in Figure 5.11. In Figure 5.12, a crystal knife rest is being sold. The place setting is necessary to help illustrate how the knife rest is used—the perfect example of a subjective shot. Otherwise, someone might think what's being sold is really a doorbell or a miniature dumbbell. Yet when put in context, it's obvious what the object is.



Figure 5.12
A knife rest with a knife,
well, resting

The lighting in Figure 5.12 is entirely natural sunlight coming in through a window. The light is diffused with a shower curtain liner. Note that the diffusion is what helps illuminate the various facets of the crystal. A narrow depth of field was chosen to keep the focus on the knife rest. Other items in the picture are present and help set the mood for the photo, as well as identify how the object is used, but they don't detract from the knife rest.

You might use Figure 5.13 in two ways, either to sell the flatware or to sell the napkin. This photograph was taken outside on a very overcast day. The depth of field is narrow, and the table that the objects are sitting on is interesting, yet doesn't pull focus from the napkin and forks.



Figure 5.13
Napkin and forks

This book does drive home the point of “less is more.” Specifically, with the wineglass example, you really need only one wineglass to sell the lot. Yet in Figure 5.13, we show four forks. The reason here is simply playfulness. As long as the multiple items can be arranged or displayed in some interesting manner, as with the eggcups in Figure 5.11, showing more can work.

For example, Figure 5.13 wouldn't work as well if the image showed only a standard flatware setting (spoon, knife, and fork). Notice that the forks are pointing the “wrong way,” toward the buyer. The end result is a more interesting shot than of, say, eight knives, eight forks, and eight spoons splayed out on someone's kitchen table.

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Avoiding the Hideously Realistic

Any object, small or large, can be photographed subjectively. All you need is that object in an environment you believe to be appealing. The keyword is “appealing,” and that means different things to different people. To achieve the proper level of appealing, you truly must understand the buyer and then apply the best subjective technique for that buyer. Sometimes the techniques work; sometimes they don’t.

For example, Figure 5.14 is definitely subjective, but it’s also disgusting. No one really wants to look at someone else’s toothbrushes, even if they are as presentable as those shown in the photograph. (There are no toothpaste blobs, for instance.) Beyond disgusting, the image is *distracting*. A flash was used, which further makes the sterile white environment unrealistic. Figure 5.14 shows no fantasy. In fact, it could be someone’s worst nightmare.



Figure 5.14
The toothbrush holder does not scream, “Buy me!”

A better example for this type of object is to consider two of this book’s rules: “keep it simple” and “less is more.” Figure 5.15 shows the same toothbrush stand, also in an environment—but not so much environment as to make the subject unappealing.



Figure 5.15
A better presentation for
the toothbrush holder

Figure 5.15 almost borders on the objective approach, save for the black-tiled background. In fact, that’s merely a sheet of tiles available at any hardware store. More important, the black helps offset the object’s white base and silver top. Any ugly reflections off the black tile were fixed using black paper as masking.

The lighting in Figure 5.15 is natural; sunlight passing through a window is diffused through a shower curtain liner.

And be careful to note that the camera angle is elevated, which helps show the shape of the base as well as the top part of the holder.

Borderline Objective Approach

Figure 5.16 illustrates an attempt to sell a cake stand using the objective approach. It really doesn’t work for a variety of reasons. The biggest reason is that in the objective environment, you really can’t tell whether it’s a cake stand, a small table, a birdbath, or something similar. The object isn’t ugly, but its use isn’t obvious.



Figure 5.16
Not the best way to showcase a cake stand; in this case, the flash doesn't help.

Another problem with Figure 5.16 is that a flash camera was used to take the image. See the ugly shadow behind the cake stand? Also notice the glare. It isn't really terrible, but with a few moments of extra preparation, this photo can be made so much better.

In Figure 5.17, the camera flash was eliminated. The photographer used the natural light coming in through the kitchen window. This took maybe two or three minutes to tape a shower curtain liner over the window. Compare Figures 5.16 and 5.17. Which would be more appealing to a buyer?



Figure 5.17
Improving the cake stand's lighting using natural light and no flash

You might also believe that something else is wrong with this image: it's set up on an infinite horizon (see Chapter 2). That device is primarily used in the objective mode. Even so, it's possible to make this a subjective shot on the infinite horizon. The trick, as with other subjective shots, is to help the buyer along by showing them how the object is used. In this case, in Figure 5.18, you simply add the cake.



Figure 5.18
A cake stand with cake

Normally you wouldn't want to mess with food in a product shot. Food is tricky to shoot, and the folks who prepare food for photographing make lots of money because they know what to do. (For example, the cake in Figure 5.18 would have been frozen solid before the piece was cut out.) Even so, using food in this manner is perfectly okay.

See how a piece was cut from the cake? This was done for two reasons. First, it helps illustrate that it is, indeed, cake on the cake stand. Second, and more important, it invites the buyer to have a piece of cake. An uncut cake might bring back memories of childhood where it was “bad” to be the first person to cut the cake. But a missing piece implies that eating the cake is okay. “Here, have some!” it says.

Adding the cake, unfortunately, does hide the true shape of the cake stand's top. That's easily fixed, however, by raising the camera angle, as shown in Figure 5.19. You'll notice that the higher angle also makes the cake look better—all that rich chocolate. Mmmm....



Figure 5.19
The last, best cake stand
shot from above

Solving Tough Problems by Having a Bit of Fun

Like jewelry, transparent things are tough to shoot. You might think that placing such an object into an environment would help, but usually what you end up with is a shot such as Figure 5.20, in which it's really hard to see what's for sale.

If you look closely, you can tell that Figure 5.20 is showing a mason jar. But why force your buyer to look that hard? Yes, it goes without saying that this is a prime example of how an object can get lost in an environment, even if that environment is trying to help sell the object, which is what the kitchen background is trying to do in Figure 5.20.

A simple solution for the mason jar is to move the camera in closer, as shown in Figure 5.21. The depth of field was also tightened, to ensure that the background doesn't overwhelm the image. The photograph's exposure time was lengthened to help get enough light onto the mason jar without creating too much glare.

In the end, Figure 5.21 is still a better shot than Figure 5.20. A serious problem remains in that the shot is boring. It's lifeless. It's too white. It probably looks like every other mason jar for sale on eBay. The solution is to have a bit of fun.

What can you put into the mason jar that will help it sell? Preserves? That would work, but it's not fun enough. Plus it doesn't solve one of the image's basic problems: a lack of color.



Figure 5.20
What's for sale here?



Figure 5.21
A mason jar shot with a
tight depth of field

In Figure 5.22, you see the insane, think-outside-the-box solution: jelly beans. Same jar. Similar setup. A piece of black paper (a “dark source”) was placed to the left of the jar to help cut down the light a bit. Color is infused into the image by adding jelly beans. The only problem now is that the buyer will probably want to pay more just so they can get the beans with the jar!



Figure 5.22
A colorful solution

Capturing Large Objects

Some objects are bulky or just downright heavy and therefore cannot be moved out of their environment. Things such as exercise equipment (weights, for example), TV consoles, furniture, large appliances, sporting equipment, and other bigger-than-a-breadbox items are best shot either subjectively or alone by removing the background in your image-editing program. Removing the background is demonstrated in Chapter 4 with examples shown in Chapter 6. But most of the time, you’ll probably find that the background environment for the object is just fine or can easily be improved with a modest amount of tidying.

Figure 5.23 shows a rather large, Japanese-style lamp. That's how the object normally sits in the room, and it looks just fine. The photographer pulled the lamp out into the light so that it would show up better. But note that the light is just regular window light. The exposure time was increased, but that's about the only special effect on the shot. Otherwise, it looks good.



Figure 5.23 The lamp in window light

Or maybe the lamp doesn't look good. One way to confirm that is to modify the setup, take a second shot, and compare the two. Figure 5.24 is exactly the same as Figure 5.23, but with the lamp lit up.



Figure 5.24
The lamp with its lights on

Which image is better? Again, it depends on your taste and also how you think the buyer would better appreciate the image. Perhaps you would use both images on eBay: Figure 5.23 to show the lamp's basic shape and design and then Figure 5.24 to show that it is a lamp and not a cleverly wrapped, gigantic wine carafe.

Step back.

Breathe.

Think.

Perhaps you can do something else with your image. Is there something else to try? If you're not satisfied, change some element. In Figure 5.25, the photographer drew the curtains. This creates the valued soft light, creating a slightly different view of

the lamp than shown in Figure 5.23. The exposure was longer to compensate for less light. Both Figures 5.23 and 5.25 are similar. Which one do you choose? That depends on which image you like or which one you feel sells the item better.



Figure 5.25
The lamp with the curtains drawn

Figure 5.26 complements Figure 5.24; it's the same shot but with the curtains drawn. Does it work better for you? Do you think the buyer would be more appreciative of one or the other?

Maybe Figure 5.26 better expresses how the lamp works with its lights on in a dark space. If so, cut back on the exposure time to make the image appear darker, as shown in Figure 5.27. Maybe that better expresses the type of mood created when the lamp is on.



Figure 5.26
The lamp with its lights on and
the curtains drawn

The two images in Figures 5.26 and 5.27 are identical. The only difference between them is the longer shutter speed of Figure 5.27. The photographer didn't really know how much longer to increase the exposure time; he used various shutter speeds and experimented until the shot finally turned out the way he intended. This is a popular technique. Don't be afraid to try it: just keep making adjustments and taking pictures. Eventually you'll end up with the type of exposure you want.

The bottom line here is to feel free to experiment. Try things! If something doesn't work, get rid of it; in fact, you can quickly delete unwanted photos right there inside your camera. When two or more images are close and you can't decide, feel free to use your personal preferences to select one or just use them both.



Figure 5.27
The same shot as Figure 5.26, but
with a longer shutter speed



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Creating Images with the Objective Approach

Witness the scrutinizing gaze of the die-hard collector and the discriminating connoisseur. They may appear cool and calculating, but beneath the poker-faced exterior plays the same sort of emotional orchestra that drives the impulsive buyer to a frenzy. The emotional need may even be greater because the collector doesn't need as much as they want.

This chapter discusses the objective approach to photographing those items you want to sell. For the buyer, the context is obvious; you don't need to do any convincing. The emotional connection is already there. Your job is to present the object practically as a thing of worship, playing right into the buyer's wants.

6

In This Chapter

- Understanding the objective approach
- Shooting flat objects
- Using the correct infinite horizon
- Making tradeoffs when fixing images
- Photographing clothes

When the Objective Connection Comes into Play

You don't need to mess around with context when you're trying to sell something familiar to someone who already wants the item. They know why they want it. They've already fantasized about how they're going to use it. Instead of pouring a big bowl of reason before them, you must do what they want and show them the item itself. Clear. Focused. Raw. After all, scrutinizing the thing is part of the fun for this type of buyer.

As with the subjective approach (covered in Chapter 5), good salespeople must know their customers. The more you know, the better you can sell your item. But for objects on the objective side, it also helps to know a bit about the object itself and which parts to showcase.

For example, a coin collector wants to know the details. They want to see how far down the Indian's cheekbone has been worn on the buffalo nickel. A movie fan really doesn't like those folds and creases in the poster, but if they exist, the potential buyer wants to see how bad they really are. The antique toy collector knows the colors on the Buck Rogers ray gun are faded and that there may be a tinge of rust—but how much? You need to consider these details if you plan to make the emotional connection with your buyer. The more you know about what they want, the better you can showcase what you have to sell.

Try to guess what the buyer is interested in. Ask yourself questions about who the buyer is, what they want, and what they're looking for specifically. Then create the image that gives the buyer the best representation of what it is you're trying to sell. Show them what they want.

Your job is to present the item for sale clearly. You want as much of the image in focus as possible. You want it bright. You want the colors perfect. And you don't want any distractions; unlike the subjective approach, the item need not be in a context or emotionally connected. Assume the buyer already knows what they want; they just want to confirm that your item is *the one* they want.

It's Flat

Most of the items photographed objectively are flat. These include things like tickets, baseball cards, paper money, coins, brochures, programs, posters, maps, photographs, stamps, magazines, documents, certificates, and a whole hoard of associated, two-dimensional items. You photograph them all in the same basic—and admittedly boring—way: hang the item on a wall and snap the picture.

Okay, maybe you don't always hang the item on a wall, but the mental image is the same for a flat object. You can show it best by taking a shot dead-on. Any fancy angles serve to distort the object and add unnecessary perspective; when you're shooting something flat, it needs to look *flat!*



Note: If you're selling an item inside a frame, keep the object inside the frame and ensure that the photograph is in the image.

Start by positioning the object flat on the wall. Don't damage the item! Don't hang it with tape or punch a hole in it with a pushpin or nail. In fact, it doesn't need to be a wall. If you have an easel you can use or something else on which to prop up the item vertically or at least at such an angle that the camera can capture the image head-on, that's okay.

The only tricky part is the lighting. Especially for a poster or something mounted in a frame, you need to ensure that there is enough light on the object and that the light doesn't reflect into the camera.

The best way to set up the lights, at least from a starting perspective, is at 90-degree angles to each other on either side of the image, as depicted in Figure 6.1. Then look through the camera to ensure that there are no reflections or unwanted glare.

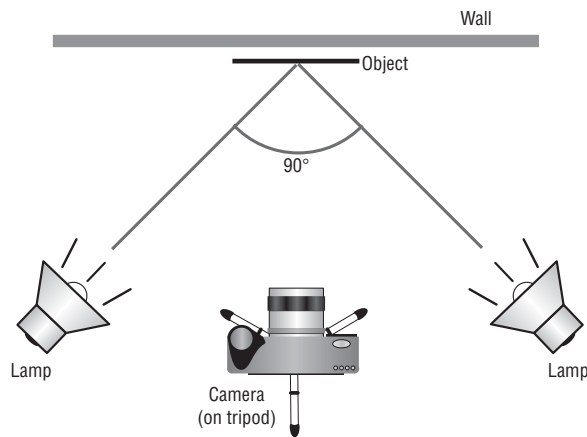


Figure 6.1
A good starting point for positioning your lights

Don't put the camera too close to the object. You want to always avoid taking a wide-angle shot. Instead, keep the camera back a ways, and zoom in a little to help frame the object. Always use a tripod!

In Figure 6.2, we have a framed set of collectors' postage stamps. It's just hanging on a wall with the lights positioned left and right as described in Figure 6.1. You can even see the shadows cast by the lights on either side of the image.

Notice how in Figure 6.2 that the camera wasn't too tightly framed on the image; there is plenty of "air" around the object. That's fine because, like many photographs, there is a need to do some touch-up in the photo-editing program. In this case, the photographer did three things to the image:

- Adjusted the color balance to account for the yellow light from the lamps
- Applied a Sharpen filter to punch up the images on the object
- Cropped the photograph so that the wall was removed and only the framed photo remained



Figure 6.2
The flat object hangs on a wall, lit properly.

Each of these techniques is covered in Chapter 4. The end result is what you see in Figure 6.3. You'll notice how well the three photographic effects helped to enhance the image and make it beautiful: the color is more pure, especially the white; the images are sharper; and with the wall/background gone, concentration is entirely on the frame and the collection of stamps.



Figure 6.3
The finished result is a stamp collection that someone would want to buy.

Note: The shot in Figure 6.2 is in focus. The difference between Figures 6.2 and 6.3 is merely a good example of how well the Sharpen filter does its job.



Is this cheating? No way! Cheating is making something bad look good. We would be cheating if, in this example, the stamps were damaged or off-color and we used photo-editing software to mask the damage and disguise the color. Doing such a thing for items you plan to sell on eBay could be considered fraud, so don't do it! Instead, use the tools that this book recommends to properly showcase the stuff you have in the best possible way.

Remember, you can apply the techniques covered in this section to anything flat. The procedure works the same way:

1. Set up the object so that the camera takes the photograph head-on. You don't want any distortions.
2. Properly light the image using two lamps, left and right, offset 90 degrees to each other. You might have to adjust the lamps up/down left/right to eliminate any glare.
3. Don't frame the image too tightly, but do step back and zoom in on the image. You want to avoid taking any wide-angle shots that merely serve to distort the object.
4. Use the photo-editing software to fix any weird colors created by the lights, to sharpen the image, and to crop out the background.

Using Infinite Horizon for Collectors' Items

Collectors love to scrutinize. They want to see as accurate an image as you can give them, so why not serve their needs and give them what they want?

To keep the focus on the image as best as possible, definitely use the infinite horizon. Also, keep the paper selection to black or white unless you can really justify how colored paper improves the object and makes a connection. (Then again, in that case, you're probably more interested in a subjective approach.)

The following sections illustrate infinite horizon examples that you can apply to any small-to-desktop-sized objects.

A White Infinite Horizon Example

Most objects work well with a white infinite horizon, such as the camera shown in Figure 6.4. The background is almost completely gone, yet the camera's shadow still keeps that object looking realistic and not stuck in a void. The bottom line is that there is nothing else in the image to distract the collector who might want this particular camera.



Figure 6.4
The raw shot of a camera

In Figure 6.5, the image is color-corrected using photo-editing software as discussed in Chapter 4. And in the final step, Figure 6.6, the image is tightly cropped, which really pulls in the details on the camera.



Figure 6.5
Color correction is added.



Figure 6.6
The image is tightly cropped.

Note: The image in Figure 6.6 is cropped, *not* enlarged. It looks like it might have been enlarged because the original image was taken at the camera's highest setting. Because of the quantity of information available at that setting, the image can be cropped between Figures 6.5 and 6.6, and the effect is that it actually looks as if the image were made larger. It wasn't.



A Black Infinite Horizon Example

The choice between black and white infinite horizons is more than aesthetic. Some objects just get lost on a white background. For example, the camera in Figure 6.6 wouldn't be as crisp on a black background—or really any other color. A white object, on the other hand, can benefit greatly from a black infinite horizon. But before doing something good, how about an awful example, as shown in Figure 6.7.



Figure 6.7
What not to do

Here's what's just plain awful about Figure 6.7:

- It's a wide-angle shot, which distorts everything in the image. See the screwdriver, how it looks bent? It's not bent in real life. Wide angle = bad! Remember that.
- The object is lying flat, which further distorts its shape.
- The screwdriver is distracting.
- The light is overhead so the object's shadows are nonexistent, making it look flat.
- The environment detracts.
- The image isn't framed or cropped.
- The item won't sell for as much as it possibly could, causing the seller to be very depressed and potentially vote Libertarian in the next election.

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The white object in Figure 6.7 begs for an infinite horizon. Because it's white, a black infinite horizon makes sense. Figure 6.8 shows a start, with the object placed on black paper to form an infinite horizon.



Figure 6.8
The beginnings of an infinite horizon setup

Despite the good start, several things are still wrong with the image in Figure 6.7. That's okay. This is how the photographer needs to work. Keep looking through that lens! When you do, you'll find the following:

- The lighting is okay on one side. It's just sunlight coming through a window, and the window has been draped with diffusion material (a shower curtain liner). But the light isn't strong enough to keep the entire object evenly lit.
- The iPod's display is muddled, difficult to see.
- There is an ugly reflection in the display.

You can fix each of these issues, but one at a time.

First, place a piece of white foam core to the left of the image to help bounce light onto the iPod. You'll notice how the card is positioned in Figure 6.9. Also notice that the infinite horizon is propped up using a paint can. Likewise, the iPod itself is propped up with a film can filled with washers (it's difficult to see in Figure 6.9), and the white foam core is propped up with a spray paint can. You don't need any fancy studio equipment or expensive setup.

To fix the reflection, cover the object being reflected with a piece of black paper. This isn't visible in Figure 6.9, but the results are shown in Figure 6.10.



Figure 6.9
The setup for the iPod shot

You're now ready to shoot the image. Notice that the light is now even, the reflections are gone, and the infinite horizon helps offset and balance the white of the iPod. The setting is objective, but not unnatural.

The final touch to improve the image is to run it through photo-editing software. There you can enhance the screen, as was demonstrated in Chapter 4, with the end result looking pretty snazzy, as you can see in Figure 6.11.



Figure 6.10 A piece of black paper has effectively removed the ugly reflection.



Figure 6.11 The final result

Beyond Black and White Horizons

Not everything is black and white. Yeah, there are shades of gray, but also bright blues, sunset oranges, and even lemony yellows. Feel free to go beyond black or white infinite horizons when the mood hits you. Experiment. Toss out what doesn't work and stick with what does work.

In Figure 6.12, you see an example of something that really doesn't work. The white laptop on the white infinite horizon is just all wrong. It's white against white! The laptop gets lost. Plus the shot shows no depth or dimensions. Remember that the objective view assumes that the buyer knows what they're getting. But in this case, they may not believe their eyes.



Figure 6.12
Wrong angle,
wrong color

A simple solution in this case is to turn the laptop and take a picture of it at a skewed angle—which is the traditional laptop photographic orientation and is shown in Figure 6.13. The lighting is dominant from one side. It's diffused. And there's a white card out of sight on the right to bounce light back. The white-on-white aspect isn't as severe in this approach, but the image could still use some improvement.

Yes, when it comes to making things better, a little daring—a modicum of insanity—often works. In this case, some purple wrapping paper did the trick, replacing the white infinite horizon as shown in Figure 6.14.

You cannot accuse the laptop in Figure 6.14 of being “lost” in the image. No, the grape infinite horizon adds a bit of fun while keeping the image toned down for the objective buyer.



Figure 6.13
A better setup



Figure 6.14
An inspired improvement

Give a Little, Take a Little

Some objects will fight with you. It's a battle of give and take; you fix one problem, and another crops up. You move the lights to the left and then back to the right. At some point, you simply have to make a decision and win one battle or the other. Even professionals face such a dilemma every day.

For example, take a look at the clock in Figure 6.15. It's set up on a nice, white infinite horizon. The light is natural, diffused sunlight coming in through a window off on the left. No white card is required to bounce or fill. The image is just fine as it is...but there is an ugly reflection across the center of the clock face. Can you see it?



Figure 6.15
A nice shot of a clock—
almost!

To fix the ugly reflection, a piece of black paper—a dark source—was employed as described in Chapter 2. The setup is shown in Figure 6.16: you can see the infinite horizon propped up on a coffee table using a stack of books. The other end is held in place using a standard hardware clamp (again, described in Chapter 2).



Figure 6.16
The clock shot setup

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The black paper was positioned to help eliminate the bad reflection. By looking through the camera, the photographer was able to properly position the paper until the reflection was gone. The paper was then taped and clamped into position (see Figure 6.17), and a new shot was taken.



Figure 6.17
The clock without the bad reflection, but less of the clock

Although the reflection is missing in Figure 6.17, something else is missing as well: that glorious, aged detail found in the clock's copper bottom. Contrast the copper bottom from Figure 6.15 with the bottom of the clock in Figure 6.17. The distressed details—which could be important to a collector—are utterly missing when the ugly reflection is fixed. Also, the image is darker.

Which one do you go with? Again, it depends on what you believe to be in the mind of your buyer. If you think the buyer would appreciate the distressed look of the clock's copper bottom, leave in the ugly reflection. If you think the reflection is bad enough to lose a sale, take it out. There really is no right or wrong.

Note: Don't waste time waffling over decisions about whether one way is better than another. Just choose. A professional photographer has the time, equipment, and dedication to make everything right. You just need to get the shot taken.



Shooting Clothes Using the Objective Approach

Forget about using models to showcase any clothing you want to sell. Even if you know an amateur model and they're willing to donate their time, it just isn't worth the effort. Remember: keep it simple. For selling clothes on eBay, simply use the objective approach and showcase the clothes you want to sell. This doesn't mean you must avoid being creative. That plays a role as well, as the photographs in this section demonstrate.

Figure 6.18 illustrates a classic blunder, not only for selling clothes but for selling anything. Some of the worst pictures on eBay have people in them.



Figure 6.18
How not to sell clothes—or anything
for that matter

Human eyeballs are geared toward looking at and appreciating the human form, especially the face. Psychologists tell us this is why we see human shapes in clouds, on cliffs, or in tree bark. No matter what, when you put a human into a photograph, the eyeball naturally wants to look at that human form and not at anything else. In Figure 6.18, you notice the person holding the overalls before *and* after you notice the overalls. Not only that, the poor gal’s head is cut off.

Generally speaking, the best way to shoot clothes is simply to lay them out on a solid background. In Figure 6.19, you see the same overalls as in Figure 6.18, but without the person or the background. The overalls are merely lying on a large sheet of white paper. To make this shot more interesting, the clothes are set at an angle. Diffused lighting is used left and right of the image—similar to how flat items are shot against a wall, but in this case the overalls were put on the floor.



Figure 6.19
A better way to sell clothes

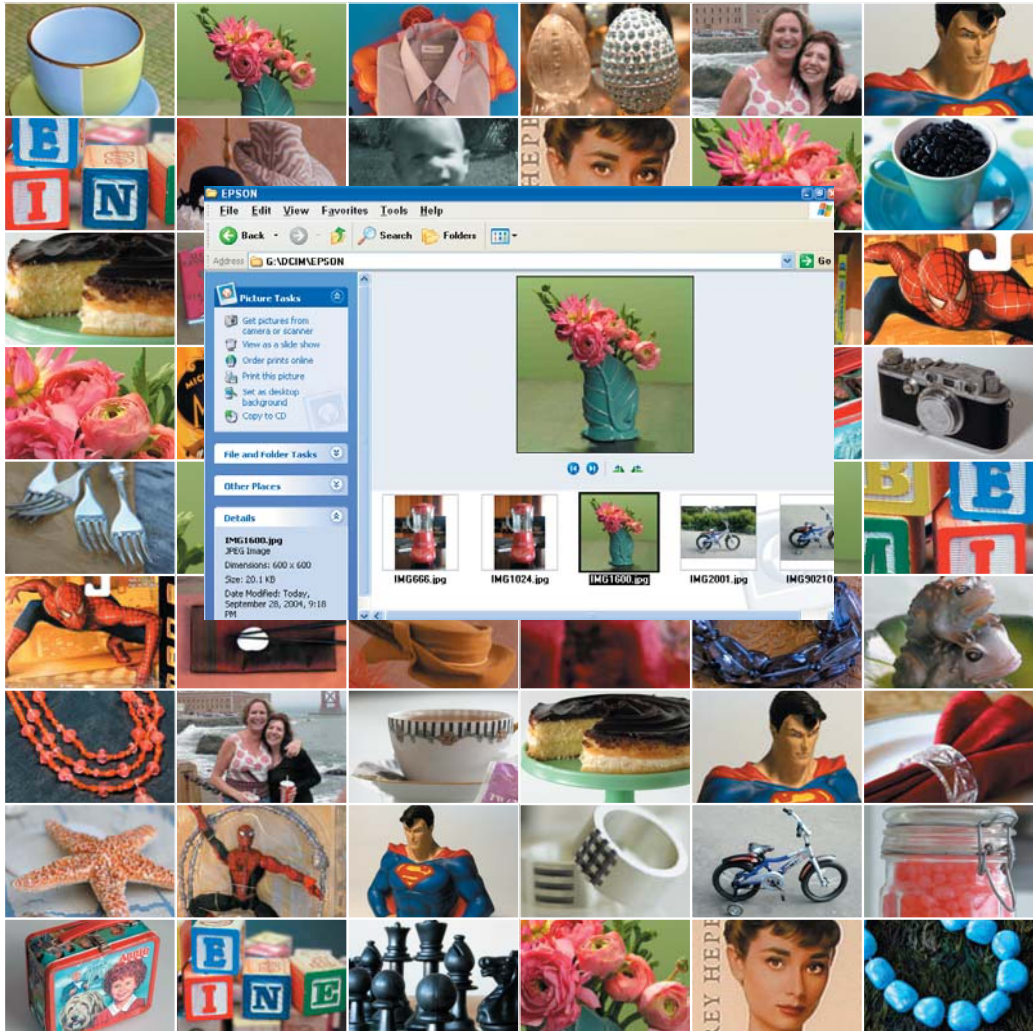
The photograph in Figure 6.19 serves the buyer well. They can see the design, the color, and the fabric and can make an educated buying decision. Nothing distracts. After all, you've got to assume that someone is merely in the market for a pair of overalls they will be supplying their own child.

Figure 6.20 shows another example of how clothing can be shot in a fun and unusual way. Rather than just lay the shirt down on a blue background, oranges were added for a wild touch. Nothing is secret here: in addition to providing a nice contrast with the blue paper background, the oranges add a sense of playfulness to an otherwise boring image.



Figure 6.20
A typical shirt, made
more interesting

Unlike the overalls in Figure 6.19, the dress shirt in Figure 6.20 is folded. A tie was added and twisted a bit so it would be the same length as the shirt. The cuffs were pinned into position. The setup time was minimal. Indeed, the photographer found the sacks of oranges in the studio and added them at the last minute just for fun. And the effect works, making the shirt look more appealing than if the oranges were not there.



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Storing Images

In the old days, photographs were printed and returned in envelopes. After living in a drawer or languishing on the kitchen table, the photos eventually found their way into albums. Some people with ample time and creativity even make a ritual out of scrapbooking their pictures with artifacts and memorabilia. That can still be done today, providing that you print your digital pictures. But most of the time, the images are stored in a digital format.

Like dust bunnies under the couch or a certain material farm animals manufacture in bulk, digital images accumulate over time. This means that eventually you'll be digitally hip-deep in your images. This presents a problem that your computer is more than able to address—providing you follow the tips, techniques, and recommendations in this chapter.

7

In This Chapter

- Transferring images to your computer
- Using media cards
- Creating a storage place for your digital photos
- Organizing your photos on the hard drive
- Archiving images

From the Camera to Your Computer

Like an undeveloped roll of film, the images you take with your digital camera do no good remaining in the camera. The idea is to get them *out*. Unlike the film world, however, no processing is involved. The pictures taken and stored in your digital camera are already stored as files—just like in the computer. Your goal is simply to transfer the files from the camera to your computer.

Once the images from your digital camera are on the computer, you can do magnificent things with them: edit them, print them, send them via e-mail, upload them to the Web, and so on. But you must get the pictures from the camera into the computer first.

The happy news is that digital camera manufacturers are aware that the images must be removed from the camera. They provide one of two ways to get the image out:

- A direct cable connection
- A media card

Of the two, you'll find that the media card works best. The direct cable connection tends to be slow and generally involves extra steps or using some special transfer software. But with the media card, working with the images is just like working with any files on your computer.



Note: If you purchased the kind of camera that this book recommends, it most likely uses a media card for storing images. Because of that, and because the direct cable connection is different for each camera, that method of moving images from the camera to the computer is not discussed here.

Media Card Madness

Good digital cameras use some type of *media card* as storage. The media card's technical name is *flash memory*, which refers to the type of computer memory inside the card. Flash memory requires no power to maintain its contents, and it can be erased and used over again and again. This makes it handy as a long-term solution for digital cameras.

As you might expect, many types of media cards are available, and they go by various names, depending on their format, size, shape, flavor, and other quantifiers:

- Compact Flash
- Memory Stick
- MultiMediaCard
- Secure Digital
- XD Picture Card

Whether you have one or the other depends on which format the camera's manufacturer deemed best. But despite the subtle visual differences, all media cards are flat, wafers that slide into and pop out of your digital camera.

Beyond the individual type, media cards are judged by their storage capacity. This is measured in megabytes (MB), the byte being the standard unit of computer storage. One megabyte is about 1 million bytes. Other standard computer storage measurements are listed in Table 7.1. Use the values to get a general idea; there is no point in memorizing the exact numbers.

► **Table 7.1** Common Computer Storage Capacity Measurements

In English	Approximate Bytes	Exact Bytes	Quantity	Abbreviation
Thousand	1,000	1,024	Kilobyte	KB
Million	1,000,000	1,048,576	Megabyte	MB
Billion	1,000,000,000	1,073,741,824	Gigabyte	GB
Trillion	1,000,000,000,000	1,099,511,627,776	Terabyte	TB

As a visual storage yardstick, a typical image on eBay uses about 50KB of storage. (And that's typical of most images you see on the Internet.) Therefore, the standard media card has more than enough room for those images. But, then again, those aren't the types of images that your camera snaps or that this book advises you use for taking the pictures.

A 1 megapixel image uses about 1MB of storage. So today's 4 to 6 megapixel cameras take 4MB to 6MB images at their highest setting. It's that highest setting that you want. Snapping a dozen pictures of those fuzzy dice that you want to sell is going to require 6MB times 12 pictures to store, or about 72MB of media card storage.

The common storage capacities for media cards are 32MB, 64MB, 128MB, 256MB, 512MB, 1GB, 2GB, and higher. The larger the media card's capacity, the more digital images it can store. For example, to store 12 pictures at 72MB each, you'll want to use a media card with at least 128MB capacity. You can guess, however, that you'll probably want to store more than 12 images at a time, so something along the line of 512MB or higher would be more appropriate.

Note: A 1,024MB media card holds the same amount of information as 1GB. Some manufacturers prefer to use 1,024MB; others cut to the chase and say 1GB. A 2GB card can also be labeled as 2,048MB.



Your camera is smart enough to keep track of the space available and used on the media card. It should display the number of images that you can store on the card, which depends on the image resolution you set. And don't forget that you can always delete images from the card right there in the camera, should space become tight. (Then again, it shouldn't be tight if you bought the right capacity media card in the first place.)

Note: Buy the highest-capacity media card that you can afford. Then buy another media card to use as a second or alternative card.



Like everything else in computers, a high-capacity memory card costs more than one of lower capacity. But rather than look at the straight cost, consider the megabyte-per-dollar cost when comparison shopping. In that perspective, a 256MB card at \$42 is double the cost per megabyte of a 1,024MB card at \$72. Even a 2,048MB, or 2GB, card at \$184 is cheaper on a per-megabyte scale than a 256MB card at \$42.

One reason that two media cards at the same capacity may be priced differently has to do with speed. The more expensive cards can often transfer data more quickly than cheaper cards. If you plan to take a lot of pictures, that can save you some time.

Finally, it's not really necessary to buy a whole stack of media cards as you would a stack of CD-R disks. For most people, one or two media cards will do. That's because you can transfer the images from the media card to your PC for long-term storage. You can then erase, or reformat, the card and use it over and over again.

The Media Card Reader

The media card that your digital camera uses is set up and read to be *mounted* on your computer system just like a new disk drive. The key to making this happen is getting a media card reader. When you're taking a lot of photos, you need one.

A specific media card reader is required for each of the different types of media cards. If your computer didn't come with a built-in media card reader, you'll want to buy a media card reader. Obviously you want a reader that accepts the type of media card that your digital camera uses. Or you can get a multiple media card reader that accepts every possible type of media card or only the most popular types.

The good news is that these media card readers are *cheap!* Most are in the \$20 range, with the more expensive models supporting several kinds of memory cards—plus maybe a USB hub or floppy drive thrown in for good measure.



Note: Before you buy a media card reader, confirm that it accepts the same type of card as used in your digital camera. Also check to see how the reader connects to your computer. Most use the USB interface, but they may not come with a USB cable. If the reader uses the Firewire, or IEEE, port, ensure that your computer has such a port available.

Mounting the Media Card

This is perhaps the easiest step of all: to access the digital pictures on your media card, simply plug it into your computer's media card reader. Both Windows XP and Mac OS X are designed to instantly recognize the media card. They then *mount* the card, adding it to the list of available disk drives in your computer system.

In Windows XP, you might see a window alerting you to the media card's addition to your computer's file system. In Figure 7.1, the window asks what you want to do, such as run Adobe Photoshop Elements. In this case, the end result you want is to copy the images from the media card, so choose the Open Folder To View Files option and then click OK.

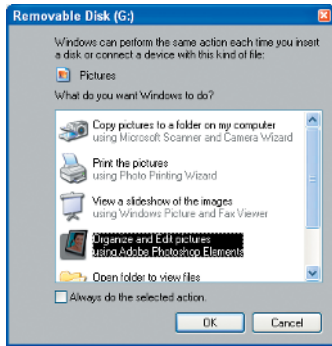


Figure 7.1
Windows XP wonders what to do with your media card.

In the Open Folder dialog box, find the images on the card. The location depends on the type of card and camera, but most of the time you'll find the images in the DCIM folder and then in a folder using part of your camera's name. At this point, you can copy all the images just as you would copy files. Here is a suggestion:

1. Press Ctrl+A to select all the image files in the folder.
2. Choose Edit > Copy To Folder to open the Copy Items dialog box.
3. Locate the proper folder for the files.

For information on creating the proper folder, see the "Building a Place for Your Images" section later in this chapter.

Note: If the Removable Disk dialog box (shown earlier in Figure 7.1) doesn't appear, open the My Computer icon on the Desktop. Locate the media card in the list of Removable Drives, and open it.




In Mac OS X, the mounted media card appears on the Desktop along with other disk drives, but has a removable disk icon . You can access the media card's files by clicking that icon or by opening any Finder window, as shown in Figure 7.2.



Figure 7.2
Digging into a media card on a Mac

Browse the media card's folder until you find where the images are stored. For many digital cameras, that location is a folder inside the DCIM folder (shown in Figure 7.2). The image folder may contain the digital camera's brand name.



Note: The media card might contain many folders. Be sure to browse them all until you find the images you want.

When you find the images, copy them all to the Mac's main hard drive. Here's how:

1. Press **⌘+A** to select all the image files in the folder.
2. Choose **Edit > Copy *n* Items**. (Replace the *n* with the exact number of image files you're copying.)



Note: You can also press **⌘+C** to copy all the selected icons.

3. Using the same Finder window, browse to the location on your hard drive where the pictures will be stored.

For more information on this folder, see the "Building a Place for Your Images" sections later in this chapter.



Note: Do not move the image files! Copy only! You want to keep the originals on the media card as a backup.


Copying the digital image files from the media card into a more permanent location on your computer's hard drive is necessary for several reasons. First, it ensures that the original image on the media card remains untouched as a temporary backup. Second, working on an image file stored on a hard drive is much faster than working directly on the flash memory card. Third, the hard drive just makes a better long-term storage location. That's because you'll eventually be reformatting the media card to reuse it.

After the images are safely moved to the hard drive, you can reformat and reuse the media card. Even so, it's a good idea to wait and first review the images on the hard drive to ensure that they're usable and ready to go. No need to rush things.

Unmounting the Media Card

After you extract the images from your media card, be careful to properly unmount it, detaching the media card from your computer's disk system. If you do not, you could mess up the card and scramble the images—something you really don't want to do.

To remove a media card using Windows XP, follow these steps:


1. Locate the Safely Remove Hardware icon in the Notification Area. You might have to click the Show Hidden Icons chevron  to find this icon.

2. Click the Safely Remove Hardware icon.
3. Choose the media card from the list that appears. Figure 7.3 shows such a list. Be careful with the names here. If you're using more than one type of removable media, ensure that you select the proper one!



Figure 7.3
Ejecting a digital media card

4. When the message appears that the card can be removed safely, go ahead and yank the sucker out. If you see a warning that the disk is in use, some program is probably accessing the media card. To fix the problem, close all open program windows and even other windows. Then try these steps again.

To properly dismount a media card in Mac OS X, locate the disk in any Finder window (see Figure 7.2, shown earlier). Click the Eject icon  to the right of the disk. As soon as the disk disappears from the list, or its icon vanishes from the Desktop, it's okay to yank out the media card.

You can also unmount the media card in OS X by Control+clicking its Desktop icon. This displays a pop-up menu, from which you can choose the Eject command. When the media card's icon is gone from the Desktop, it's okay to remove the card from the reader.

Building a Place for Your Images

Keeping your images organized is key to your digital photography sanity. The opposite is madness: you'll find that your computer has a single folder with perhaps several hundred (or thousand) image files. They're all named with the same annoying random number scheme that the camera gave them. Trying to find that one image you want will take you weeks. It's best that you try now to avoid that.

The Main Pictures Folder

Both Windows and Mac OS X have a built-in home plate for your image files.

In Windows XP, it's called the My Pictures folder , and it's found right there in the main My Documents folder.

In Mac OS X, the folder is called Pictures , and it's found right there in your home directory.

Both the My Pictures and Pictures folders are *excellent* starting places for your digital image storage needs. From those basic locations, you need to create even more folders. Use the folder as the tool to help keep your images organized. The operating system provides the material and tools, but you must provide the effort to make it all work.

Creating a Main Folder for the Stuff You Sell

Start by creating a home base for your digital images. The My Pictures or Pictures folder is fine, but you want yet another home base, one for the digital images that you use to *sell*. As an example, create an eBay folder inside your My Pictures folder. Here's how:

1. In Windows, open the My Documents folder, and then open the My Pictures folder to see its contents. In OS X, open any Finder window, and then click the Pictures shortcut to see the contents of that folder.
2. In Windows, choose File > New > Folder to display a new folder icon named New Folder. In OS X, choose File > New Folder to display the New Folder icon, which is named Untitled Folder.
3. Type a new name for the folder, such as **eBay**.

When you type the folder name right after step 2, there is no need to select the folder icon or use the Rename command; the new folder's icon is already prepped for renaming. Even so, to rename a folder in Windows, select the folder and press F2. You can then type the new name.

To rename an icon in Mac OS X, click to select the icon, press Enter, and then type the new name.

You can use these steps to create any folder on your computer, as mentioned in the sections that follow. For now, the new folder that you just created, the eBay folder, will be the main storage point for all the images you'll be creating and using to sell stuff on eBay.

If you plan to sell your stuff on other web auction sites or places such as Amazon or Yahoo!, create folders for those locations as well.

Organizing and Using the Folders

Creating a main folder for the images of items that you plan to sell is only the beginning. Your next step is to create even more folders. Here you have to make a decision: Do you organize the folders by project or by date? Or do you perhaps use a mixture of both? Either way, the idea is to keep things organized so that you can find what you need quickly when you need it.

For example, suppose that you're only an occasional seller on eBay. If so, consider organizing your images by project. Suppose the first thing you sell is your old LP collection. Here are the approximate steps that you would take to keep those images organized:

1. Take the pictures with your camera. Thanks to all the information in this book, the pictures are excellent and properly showcase your stuff.
2. Open your computer's My Pictures or Pictures folder, and then open the eBay folder.
3. Create a new folder for the pictures based on the project. In this case, call the folder **LP Collection**.
4. Copy the images from your digital camera into the LP Collection folder.

This keeps those images together and organized. (And there's more to do, as covered in the following sections.) By keeping this up, you'll always know where your images are.

Continue this process for everything you sell: create a folder, name that folder to describe its contents, and then copy your images to that folder. When you sell your old science fiction novels, create a Science Fiction Novels folder for those images. When you sell those golf clubs, create and use the Golf Clubs folder. Figure 7.4 gives an idea of what's going on here.

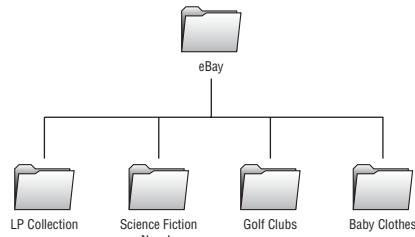


Figure 7.4
A simple folder organization strategy for organizing your images

Note: It may be tempting as an occasional seller to just dump all your pictures into one folder. Try not to! After all, if some items sell and others don't, you might want to reuse the images of those things that didn't sell. By keeping items in separate folders, you make finding things easier.



When you sell a lot of stuff, it might be a better idea to organize your folders by dates and then perhaps individual categories. Figure 7.5 illustrates this approach. Individual folders are created for each year and then for each month beneath those folders. Within each month's folders are other folders for the items you sell that month.

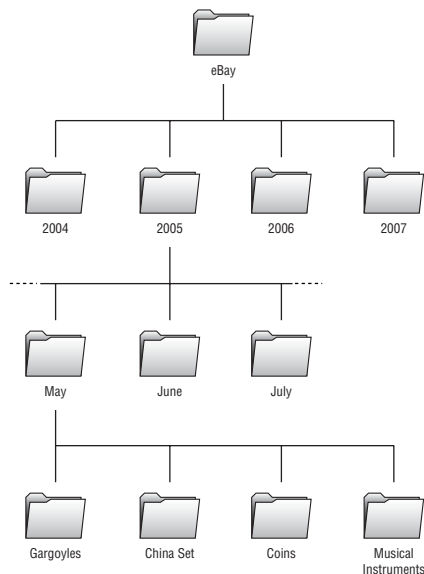


Figure 7.5
A more complex folder organizational strategy

Naming Your Images

Almost immediately upon copying the images to your computer's hard drive, in the properly created folder (per the previous sections), the next step is to give the image files a proper, descriptive name.

In Windows, the command to rename a file is File > Rename, or you can select the file's icon and press F2. In OS X, to rename a file, select it, press Enter, and then type the new name.



Note: When renaming an image file, be careful not to change the filename's extension. That's the last part of the filename, beginning with a period and usually containing three or four characters: .JPG, .CRW, .JPEG, .TIFF, .TIF, and so on. The operating system uses the filename extension to recognize the file as an image or a graphic.

The problem you'll run into here is that it helps to know what the image is so that you can give it a proper name. Your camera most likely names the raw images based on some storage scheme or a dating scheme or just by using the most confusing naming system possible. So you need to preview the image before renaming it.

In Windows, to preview an image in a folder, choose View > Filmstrip or View > Thumbnails from the folder's menu. This mode previews not only images on the bottom of the screen, but lets you see an individual file's image quite large up top, as shown in Figure 7.6.

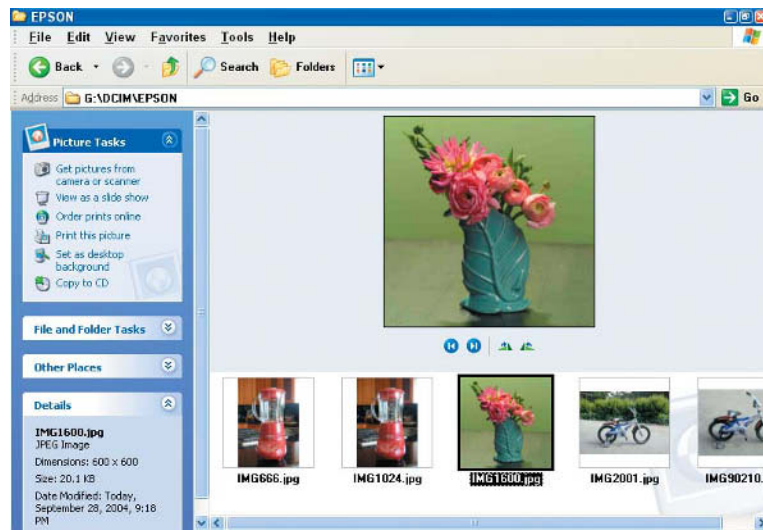


Figure 7.6 Previewing image files in Windows

For example, Figure 7.6 shows an image of a vase. The image file's current name is IMG1600.JPG. A better name would be vase.jpg. A better, more descriptive name would be leaf vase with flowers.jpg. Use Windows to rename this and all the files you plan to use.

In the OS X Finder, choose View > Columns from the menu. In this mode, when you click an image filename, a preview of the image appears in the column on the right, as shown in Figure 7.7. Using that example, which shows a blender, you would probably want to rename the image file from IMG666.JPG to blender.jpg. A better, more descriptive name would be redblender.jpg.

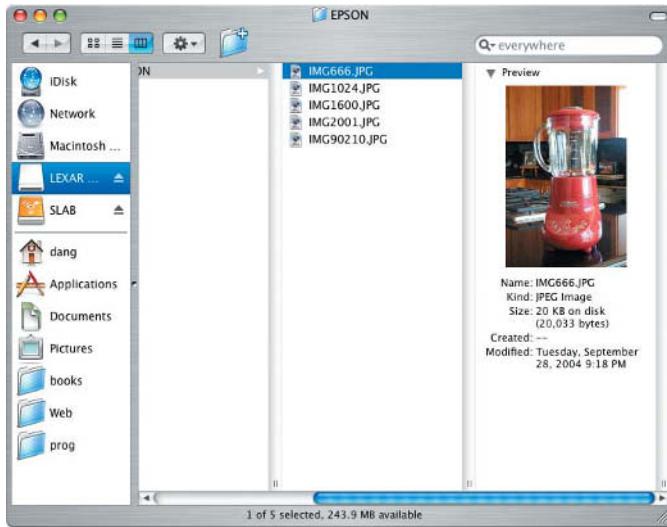


Figure 7.7 Previewing an image on the Mac

Together with the new filenames and their folders, you should be able to easily locate any saved image on your hard drive.

Note: Neither Windows nor Mac OS X can preview all camera image types. For example, the operating system may not understand the “raw” format used by many cameras at their highest resolution. Such a format is understood by photo-editing software, such as Adobe Photoshop Elements. You can use Elements to load your image files and then quickly resave them back to disk in the same format, but with a new, better name.



Saving the Image in Two Formats

After you create the folder, copy the images, and give them new names, the next step is to use your photo-editing software to touch up and fix each image. This is a required step: even if the image is perfect, you're still going to need to use the photo-editing software to resize the image properly for the Web, as well as save it in the recommended format (usually JPEG).

The best way to save the fixed or resized image is under a new filename. This way, you can keep the image in both original and edited forms, each having its own unique yet similar name.

For example, suppose you begin with an image named 9356701.JPG. That's the way the image file came from the camera. The image is of a barber pole that you're planning to sell on eBay. Here's what to do:

1. Copy the image into the proper folder on your hard drive. For example, the Barber Pole folder beneath the eBay folder.
2. Rename the image to BARBER_POLE.JPG.
3. Open your photo-editing program.
4. Load the image BARBER_POLE.JPG.
5. Immediately save the image back to disk in the TIFF file format.

TIFF is the best format for the long-term storage of images. It's better than JPEG, and it's compatible between major applications. Do not use the Photoshop, PSD, Raw, EPS, PDF, or other tempting file formats. They are not as common as TIFF.

6. Edit your image or resize it, whichever is required.
7. Save the resulting image in the file format needed. For example, for eBay, that would be a JPEG image. Also name the file so that you know it is ready for eBay, for example, BARBER_POLE_EBAY.JPG or even BARPOLE_EBAY.JPG. That way, you'll still be able to associate the original and eBay copy of the photos, but know which is which just by looking at the names.

Remember that the names are for *you*. If you want to name the pictures after lot numbers or catalog numbers, that also works. But remember to give different names to each image.



Note: If you want to keep the files sorted, consider adding a numeric prefix to the renamed files. For example, a file named 00_jacket.jpg will sort higher in a list of files than jacket.jpg does. That way, you can freely assign descriptive names to your images, but use the prefixed number to help keep things sorted the way you like.

By retaining the camera's original image, you give yourself a second chance to edit it and use it again, say, in another format. It's much better to continue to deal with an original than a copy. For example, suppose eBay wants the image resized to a 50KB JPEG, but you plan to use the same image in a newspaper ad, and they want a 300 dpi TIFF image. When you still have both images, you're far better off. But archiving is more than that.

See Chapter 4 for information about saving images in different graphics file formats.

When to Delete Images or Folders

After the item is sold, paid for, shipped, and received, you can delete the images. Obviously, if the item is no longer in your possession, its image is no longer necessary.

When you're organizing images by folder, you can save time by deleting the item's folder. That not only removes the folder but all the folder's contents as well.

For items that don't sell, keeping the folder and the image files is best. That way, you can reuse them or fill the folders with new pictures should you decide to try another approach to selling your items.

Of course, one school of thought says never delete your images. Just as you wouldn't delete old letters or documents, you might consider keeping or archiving the photographs. Refer to the next section.

Archiving Images

These are the Digital Dark Ages. Because so much of this culture's information is stored electronically, without a printed copy ever being made, we run the risk of leaving nothing substantial of our work for posterity to examine. Eventually, over time, all those electronic particles on a hard drive will realign themselves with the earth's magnetic poles. Data on a CD-R is good for only a few years. And images on the Web come and go like tumbleweeds.

If you want to keep your digital images around for a long time, you're going to have to make an effort at it. The process is referred to as *archiving*, and it's the art of storing stuff long-term and keeping your images from becoming lost.

Note: Yes, you can always print your images. For family and even photos, there's nothing better that you can do with your digital images.



The best way to protect your images is to keep multiple copies. You're already doing that if you're following the advice in this chapter. Your hard drive should contain the original image file from the camera, resaved as a TIFF file, and the edited version that you used on eBay or for whatever other purpose.

Beyond saving the original on the hard drive, consider storing the original images on another source. Professional photographers pay lots of money to keep their images on server farms, where the images are saved multiple times in multiple locations. This is a great solution, but it's rather expensive for the nonprofessional.

For the amateur, there are three common archiving solutions: CD-Rs, the Internet, and external hard drives.

CD-R disks are easy to create on those computers that have CD-R drives. Do use the CD-R disks, which are cheaper than CD-RWs. Every few months or so, archive those images you want to keep to a CD-R. That gives you the necessary two copies: one on the hard drive and a second copy on the CD-R.

After a few months, make another CD-R. Include all the data on the original CD-R, plus the new stuff you've created. Keep both the original CD-R and the most recent for a few months when, again, you repeat the process.

Eventually you can dispose of (or recycle) the older CD-Rs. But by keeping up fresh copies, you ensure that a backup image is always available.



Note: CDs are not eternal! Recent tests have discovered that data tends to corrupt on a CD after only a few years. After 10 or more years, a CD-R can lose all its data. The solution is to *continually* make archives on CD-Rs, keeping the new copies and throwing the old ones away.

Another backup location worth considering is the Internet. If you already have storage available from your ISP or an online disk service, use it! Ensure that the disk storage is routinely backed up to your satisfaction. And remember: the more locations you use for archiving on the Internet, the better your chances that the images will be safe.

Besides raw disk storage, you might also consider one of the many photographic repositories available. Most of them are for image sharing, allowing you to post JPEG images for others to browse or ogle over. Instead of those, you really need to consider raw disk storage; you'll be archiving TIFF images, which aren't designed for casual Internet viewing.



Note: Search the Internet for "disk storage" or "photo storage" to find a few sites to choose from.

Finally, there is the second hard-drive option. External hard drives are cheap, roomy, and available everywhere. They're also the easiest way to store extra copies of your images because the hard drive is added to your disk system like any other disk drive. Unlike a CD-R, there is no "burning" step, and unlike the Internet, you don't have to wait for manual uploads or FTPs.

Get a hard drive that uses either the USB 2 or Firewire (or IEEE) connection. That way you'll be assured that any of today's computers can access and get at the hard drive's information. Avoid trying to encrypt or password-protect the external drive; just keep the files on there as plainly as possible so that any computer in the future can gain access.

Appendices



Getting the Image to eBay



The folks at eBay provide lots of hints to help you get your image properly formatted and ready for posting on their system, helping you to sell your item. This appendix distills some of that information for you.

First, Some Basics

There are two simple rules for your online photo files:

- Save the image using the JPEG or GIF graphics format.
- Ensure that the image is less than 50KB in size.

Between JPEG and GIF, use the JPEG format, which is richer for showcasing the kind of quality photographs this book prepares you to take. JPEG photographs also have a quality rating; save your image using the Good or Excellent setting, which is usually 8 out of 10, with 10 being the highest quality.

The 50KB size limit is to your advantage. Not everyone on the Internet has a 3Mbps cable Internet connection. Many people still use dial-up modems. You don't want any buyer, regardless of their Internet connection speed, having to sit and wait for your image to download.

Consider the 50KB size limit only a guideline. If you want a bigger image to show more detail, use it. But do be aware that larger images take longer to display.

As far as getting the image to eBay, you can use one of their photo services, or you can use your own web space or space on a picture server to make the image available. eBay lets you post one picture at no cost, but more pictures—and more features—will cost you money. Also, the alternative requires a knowledge of FTP, or the technique of sending raw files on the Internet.

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Resizing Your Image

Saving an image at 50KB in size really means that you need to resize it, or reduce it so that the resolution settings—whatever they may be—equate to 50KB. This is easy enough to do in Photoshop Elements because the Image Size dialog box shows you the file size at the top, as shown in Figure A.1.

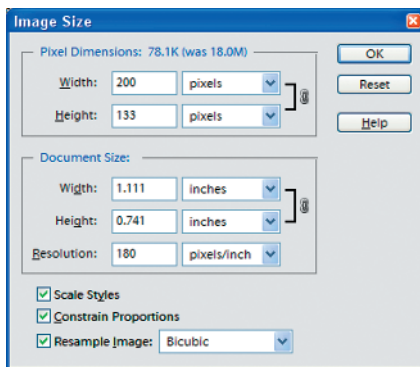


Figure A.1
Reducing the size of an image in the Image Size dialog

To change the image size, first ensure that all your work is done on the image at its original camera resolution. Fix the color balance, crop, rotate, and take of all those basic tasks as described in Chapter 4. Then follow these steps in Photoshop Elements to complete the process:

1. Choose Image > Resize > Image Size to open the Image Size dialog box. The current width and height values in pixels are shown in the top section.
2. Select Width or Height, whichever is greater, and enter 300. There is nothing magic about 300; it's just a value to start with. After you type 300, the values in the other boxes change, as does the file size at the top of the dialog box. If the file size value is still too large, try a smaller value, say 250 and then 200. Eventually you'll get down low enough to display the file size close enough to 50KB.
3. Click OK to resize the image. Don't be shocked if the resized image appears very tiny on your monitor! This is common, but it's not bad:
4. Set the image's zoom to 100 percent. In Photoshop Elements, choose View > Actual Pixels. View the image. How does it look? Are you happy? If not, make it larger. Remember, the 50KB limit is to your benefit. A 100KB image will take twice as long to appear for some people. If you want to fix things, choose Edit > Undo Image Size, and start over. Otherwise, your image is ready for saving.

Another thing to keep in mind, and they even say this in the picture area on eBay: buyers love *detail!* If you took your image to show off detail, by all means go with something larger than 50KB.

Saving in the Proper Format

Here are the steps to save your image to disk as a JPEG using Photoshop Elements. These steps assume that your image has already been fixed up and resized and is ready to go:

1. Choose File > Save As to open the Save As dialog box.
2. Find the proper folder in which to save your image. See Chapter 7 for more information on organizing your images into folders.
3. Double-check the filename, ensuring that it's short, sweet, and to the point.
4. Choose JPEG from the Format list.
5. Click the Save button to open the JPEG Options dialog box, as shown in Figure A.2.

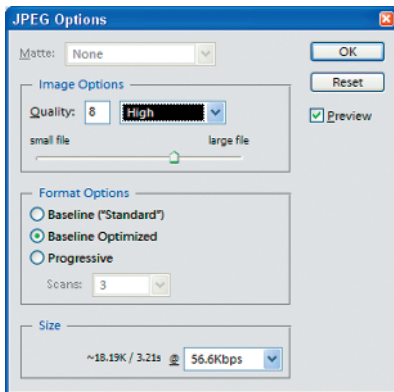


Figure A.2
Setting various JPEG
image format options

6. Set the quality to High or 8. You can ignore the rest of the settings in the JPEG Options dialog box.

There is really no point in going higher on the quality. The eye cannot really tell the difference between a JPEG image saved at 8, 9, or 10, but higher-quality values mean a larger image file on disk. That shouldn't be a concern, however, given that you still have the original camera raw or TIFF image on your hard drive, per this book's instructions in Chapter 7.

7. Click OK. With the image saved, you can now close its window and optionally quit Photoshop Elements if that is your wont.

After saving the image to disk, go out to the folder in which it was saved. (Use your computer's operating system.) View the file's size in that folder. You might be surprised to find that it's a lot smaller than the photo-editing program said it would be. If so, freely go back into your photo-editing program, and, with the *original image*, create another JPEG copy but at a larger size. After all, if eBay is giving you the 50KB, you might as well take full advantage of it!

Note: Eventually you'll get good at selecting a proper size for your image. I find that about 300 pixels on the longest edge generally produces a file size of 50KB for most JPEG images saved at quality level 8.

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Uploading a Free Image to eBay

At no cost, eBay lets you put one picture per item on their website. You can add more pictures if you like, or you can subscribe to their picture-hosting service, all at additional fees. (This is true as this book goes to press; it doesn't account for various deals or specials that might be offered from time to time.)

To add your photograph, you must complete the information for your item that you want to sell, filling in each page as required. At some point, you'll see the Basic eBay Picture area, where you'll find a Browse button. That's the key to getting the image from your computer to eBay. Here is how it works:

1. Click the Browse button to open a dialog box that works just like the Open dialog box in any program.



Note: Some web browsers may not be able to perform the functions outlined in these steps. It's recommended that you use Internet Explorer 4 or later for the best results.

2. In the dialog box, locate the folder in which you put your picture.
3. Click to select your picture's filename in the dialog box. The picture must be prepared for uploading to eBay as described in this appendix.
4. Click the Open button. At this point, the dialog box closes and you'll be back on eBay's seller configuration web page.

At some point, you'll be able to locate a link or button that lets you preview your item's page. The image isn't really transferred (uploaded) until you either preview the page or complete the entire process.

Remember: nothing is finally set until you tell eBay that you're ready to commit. If you change your mind, it's easy to use your web browser's Back button and start over.

Graphics File Formats

Here are some common graphics file formats. Though this book speaks of only JPG, GIF, TIFF and RAW, you may encounter these other formats on the Internet or in your photo-editing application. This appendix explains what the formats are, lists their file extensions, and provides a brief description. Of course, all that should make sense at first glance. But this book's design requires some introductory text, which is what you're reading now.

B

Format	Extension	Description
Windows Bitmap	BMP	This is the format that Windows originally used to display graphics images and the format still used by the Paint program in Windows. The files saved in this format are uncompressed and therefore really large. That makes them ill-suited for the Internet, e-mail, or really anything outside Windows itself.
Encapsulated Postscript	EPS	This is a great format for exchanging complex drawings between applications that understand the EPS standard. EPS files are all plain text, which means they can be compressed easily. But outside the graphics applications arena, you won't see many EPS files.
Graphics Interchange Format	GIF	This is the second most popular format for image files on the Internet. GIF images don't take up much space, so they're good for e-mail. The only liability is that GIF images can be only 256 colors "deep." Consequently, their representation of real-world images (such as people, landscapes, and so on) isn't so hot.
Joint Photographic Experts Group	JPG, JPEG	This is the most common graphics file format and is excellent for representing real-world images. JPEG images can also be optionally compressed, making them ideal for the Web and e-mail. A problem with JPEG, however, is that compressing the images often results in a loss of information, which is especially evident when choosing low-quality settings or saving over two or three generations (opening and resaving) of an image.
Portable Network Graphics	PNS	This standard, or ping as it's commonly known, is the graphics file format standard of the future. PNG has all the advantages of both GIF and JPEG, making it ideal for the Internet: the images look good, they compress well, they can be animated, and technically the standard is far better than either GIF or JPEG. The only drawback is that PNG is new and therefore not as widely supported.
Photoshop	PSD PDD	This is the standard image format used by Adobe's Photoshop and Photoshop Elements graphics-editing programs. It's truly the best format in which to save your graphics files if you use Photoshop, but few other applications recognize or use the standard.
Camera raw	RAW NEF RAF ORF MRF	This format is used by digital cameras. It contains the "raw" camera image—the exact pixels captured by the camera's gizmo without any regards to in-camera adjustments such as white balance, tonal controls, or other modifications. The file size is huge; after all, the RAW format is just raw bytes. A 5-megapixel camera generates a 5MB RAW image file.
Tagged Image File Format	TIF, TIFF	This format is one of the oldest and most common graphics file formats. Just about every major application supports TIFF graphics, which means that it's an excellent format to choose for saving images long term (far better than JPEG). But because TIFF files are so huge, they are not good at all for the Internet or for sending by e-mail. For example, a JPEG image that is only 35KB in size could be an equivalent 1.5MB TIFF image.

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