

Photoshop Elements SIG – January 12, 2005

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Photoshop Elements Intro

The focus of this Special Interest Group (SIG) will be to show how you can improve the quality and clarity of your digital photos. Since we need to start somewhere, we assume that you can either download your digital photos from your camera to your computer or scan your pictures into your computer. Although Photoshop Elements was developed as the “baby brother” version (or baby sister if you like) of Photoshop, PE remains an extremely powerful tool for processing and manipulating digital images. Photoshop Elements is now in its third major release as Photoshop Elements 3 (PE 3). We will show you how to work with either PE 2 or 3 in this SIG. In this first meeting we will review the basics of both PE 2 and PE 3. We will look at the similarities and the differences between the two. We will also show how to use the Quick Fix capabilities of each to get you started cleaning up your photos.

Photoshop Elements 2

The major sections of PE 2 are the Menu at the top, the Tool Bar on the left side, and the Palettes that reside on the right side of the screen. When you first look at the Menu, don't be surprised if many of the entries are grayed out. To see those, you need to open a digital photo or image. After the image is open, I recommend doing two things. The first is to save a copy of your photo in the Photoshop format, PSD. Do this by selecting **File > Save As**, and then select PSD from the drop-down menu of the choices of file types. This protects your original digital image, which you need to treat as your digital “negative”. Don't mess with it, don't touch it, leave it alone. Make all your changes on your PSD version, which is a copy of the original. The second is to bring up the Rulers. Do this by selecting **View > Rulers**. This will show you the size of picture your digital camera captured. Oftentimes, this is your first rude awakening that

shows how you messed up by using a lower resolution in your camera in order to cram more pictures onto the camera's compact chip. Oh, well. Next time, I recommend that you use the maximum resolution available in your camera to shoot your pictures. If you use the maximum resolution, you can use the power of Photoshop Elements to crop, clean up, and brighten your picture; even print a beautiful 8' x 10' glossy. But if you took your images in a lower resolution mode, you may be stuck with real nice 4" x 6" prints.

The other feature I recommend viewing is the Image Size. To get this, select **Image > Resize > Image Size**. This not only shows the sizes of the “Document” (aka photo), but it also gives the Resolution of the image. If you used max resolution in your camera, you are probably looking at 200 pixels/inch or better for your resolution – just fine for making prints. Some experts say you can go as low as 150 – 160 pixels per inch and get a decent 8”x10” print. It all depends on your printer. The minimum resolution for viewing photos on your computer screen or a television is 72 pixels per inch. In fact, most algorithms that convert your pictures into “Web” images or email attachments do the conversion to 72 pixels per inch.

PE 2 Quick Fixes

PE 2 has some shortcuts for cleaning up your digital pictures. They can be used by a beginner who is just becoming familiar with PE and its capability. To see these Quick Fixes, open a picture and select **Enhance > Quick Fix**. This next screen use to totally buffalo me when I first started using PE. Frankly, it is confusing because it offers too much. PE 3 has modified the approach to Quick Fixes, and is much better – which we will see in a moment. But first, we will look at PE 2. The process I recommend with the PE 2 Quick Fix screen is to select the radio button for **Brightness** in the first “category”

column. Then select the radio button for **Auto Levels** in the “adjustment” column. Click **Apply** and watch the change in the **After** picture. Then, with the screen still open and with **Brightness** still selected, select **Auto Contrast** in the second column. Click **Apply** and the change for Auto Contrast is added to the first change for Auto Levels. There is one more step. Select **Color Correction** in the first column. The radio button in column two should be on **Auto Color**. Click **Apply**. The After picture will show the accumulation of all three fixes. **If you don’t like what you see**, you can click **Reset Image** and return to your original picture. **If you like the result**, click **OK** to finish the image. You can use the other menu selections under Enhance to achieve similar results. By selecting **Enhance > Auto Levels**, **Enhance > Auto Contrast**, and then **Enhance > Auto Color Correction**, you get the same result in the end.

Photoshop Elements 3

Photoshop Elements 3 has two separate programs at its core: an Organizer and an Editor. The Organizer will scan your hard drive and find all your graphic images. You can sort your images, label your images, make calendars and do all sorts of stuff. The Organizer is a follow-on to Photoshop Album 2 and is included as part of the basic cost for PE 3. The other program is the Photo Editor, which includes Quick Fix and the Standard Editor, just like in PE 2. The interface in the Photo Editor is changed to look a little different from PE 2 and a few more commands exist, but the program is basically the same.

PE 3 Welcome Screen

The Welcome Screen is the first thing you will see when you open PE 3. While you can access all the features of the program from here, I recommend you change the default on the opening sequence. There is a drop-down menu at the bottom left of the Welcome Screen for Start Up In. Click on the **drop-down menu** and select **Editor**. Then for this first time click on

Edit and Enhance Photos in the upper part of the Welcome Screen. The next time you open PE 3, it will open to the Photo Editor.

The linguistics in PE 3 is a little challenging. For example, if you want to look at a Photo Browser similar to what you used in PE 2, you should select **File > Browse Folders**, and the File Browser will open. If you make the mistake of clicking on **Photo Browser** in the middle of the screen, just under the menu, you will open the Organizer, a totally different program. Try it. After it opens, notice that you will have a new entry in the Windows Task Bar at the bottom of the screen for the Organizer. We will talk about the Organizer in other sessions of the SIG, but for now – just close it and go back to the Editor.

Open a photo. Notice that the Tool Bar in PE 3 is a single column on the left, as opposed to the twin columns of PE 2. The photo is also surrounded by a grey border, and the Palettes are now grouped in a column on the right-hand side of the screen. The Editor works in either the Quick Fix or the Standard Edit mode. You can easily toggle between the two.

PE 3 Quick Fix

With the photo still open, select the tab for Quick Fix. The options are now all in the right column. For a single, all-encompassing fix, select the **Auto** icon for **Smart Fix**. You can either save that or select the **Reset** icon above the photo. Reset the photo for now, and note the individual **Auto** icons in the right column for **Levels**, **Contrast**, and **Color**. Each of these can be tweaked or implemented in the default position. To repeat the process we used in PE 2, click Auto for Levels, Contrast and Color in sequence. We get the same result. PE 3 Quick Fix seems much easier to use than PE 2.

Standard Editor for PE 2 and PE 3

In future SIGs we will show how to use the many different tools of PE in the Standard Editor mode. These contain the real power of Photoshop Elements.