



Watercolor Society of Alabama

HOW TO PREPARE YOUR DIGITAL IMAGES FOR ENTERING A WSA EXHIBITION TUTORIAL

**by
Jaceena Shepard,
Exhibition Director**

You have received the WSA Prospectus for a WSA Exhibition and Competition and you notice that it specifies “Online Entry Only”. “Why”? CD and Email entry is becoming obsolete and WSA needed an alternative to these processes. Digital media, which is more versatile in nature, provides us with a more streamlined application process. So remember, for the WSA National Exhibitions, only online digital entries are now allowed. You may ask yourself how you are going to make this happen because you have always submitted CD or email images and applications and you are not familiar with the process for preparing your images to comply with the Prospectus in order to upload them online.

- Don't be dismayed; WSA wants to make it as easy for you as possible so I have outlined some tips for you on how to prepare you images.
- Don't be intimidated by the length of this article. It is a detailed attempt to answer the many questions I've had concerning editing digital images for competitions.
- Those proficient in using digital image-editing software may have different methods, but I believe these steps to be the most efficient for novices learning to prepare images for competitions.

The 10 Steps below indicate one method of formatting images using Adobe Photoshop Elements.

The web is also a great source for Photoshop tutorials and tips on other types of photo-editing programs. Simply type in “Photoshop tutorial” or “photo-editing tips” on any popular search engine. Other comparable photo editing programs include: Corel Paint Shop Pro and Microsoft Digital Image Suite. I recommend investing in a photo-editing program that is comfortable for your needs and skill level. Most of the better programs have free trial policies.

First, I need to explain the digital terminology used in the Prospectus Entry Procedures.

a. “Color must be accurate”

- Color space is a way in which your computer processes and displays color. sRGB is a color space that has been accepted as one of the standard ways to view digital media on computers, monitors, and the Internet. While saving your images in the sRGB color space isn't essential, you will have a more consistent result with what jurors will ultimately view. Jurors are encouraged to set their monitors to sRGB. I also encourage you to save your image with an sRGB color profile (Instructions below) and calibrate your monitor to an sRGB color space.

b. Image Specifications:

- "Images must be 300 dpi (dots per inch)" – Here we are speaking of "Resolution". Resolution is the amount of detail in an image. Digital images are measured by the number of "pixels per inch" (ppi). For printing, resolution is measured by the number of pixels printed in a linear inch (dpi - think little colored dots). The higher the resolution (i.e.- 300dpi), the larger the file size and the greater the image clarity will be when it is printed. The closer the pixels are packed together, the smaller the viewed image will be. The lower the resolution (i.e. – 72dpi), the more loosely the pixels are packed together. The image will be larger but the image also loses definition/clarity and the print will be totally undesirable. WSA needs high-resolution images for printing the catalogue (Instructions below).

c. Save in JPEG - JPEG means "Joint Photographic Experts Group" which is the name of the group that developed this particular format. JPEG is defined as a standard computer file format for storing graphic images in a compressed form for general use (it takes up less storage space).

d. Format not to exceed 3MB – This means the size of one image file when you are finished preparing the image for entry. (Instructions below.)

Everything you need to know about entering the competition is outlined in the Prospectus. Read it over and over again. Highlight important areas that you will want to remember. Make a checklist of what you will need to do before mailing your entry. After you have digested the entry requirements, you are ready to upload/transfer your camera images to your computer. In order to process your images you will need photo-editing software that can resize images, change image resolution, and save images as JPEGs or TIFFs. Most cameras come with a photo editing package that will help you format your images successfully. However, packaged software is available for purchase as well as free downloadable software.

- Adobe Photoshop/Adobe Photoshop Elements (www.adobe.com) are very popular among artists and designers. Photoshop Elements is a less expensive option and they have a 30-day trial if you wish to try the program before purchasing it. It will do everything needed to enter competitions and works with both PC/Mac computers
- Get Paint (www.getpaint.net) a free open-source program for Windows-based computers, can also help to format images successfully. If you are a Mac user, download Gimp (www.gimp.org) a useful free image editing program.
- Sumo, Aviary, and Pixir are some of the few websites that offer image-editing right in the browser.

I use Photoshop Elements because it is user friendly, has a great “Help” section to guide me along, and costs approximately \$100.00. I will explain the image editing process using this program but most all such programs are similar. If you become totally confused using a different program, I’m sure you have children, neighbors, or know other artists who can help you. Search your program website for tutorials. If purchasing a photo-editing program is out of your budget or you are short on time, having a digital professional prepare your images for upload may be your best option. Just search for “digital imaging resources” and choose the one best for you.

Begin by uploading the images from your camera to your computer. If possible, it is best to start with an original uncompressed image file (TIFF or RAW) that has been uploaded to your computer. RAW will normally show the file extension as “NEF”. Starting with JPEG files will suffice if a TIFF is not available, however, you must first save the JPEG files and your RAW files as a TIFF file before making any adjustments to them (Go to File, Save As, name of image, Where to Save, TIFF, Save).

Step 1.

Open your image TIFF file in the photo-editing program.

Step 2.

Go to “Image” on the pull down menu and select “Mode”. If the Mode is not set to RGB, click on Convert Color Profile and select “Apply sRGB profile”.

Step 3.

On the Image menu, click “Resize” and select “Image Size”. Make sure the “Resample Image” box is unchecked, and that the “Constrain Proportions” box is checked. These boxes are below the document size area.

(Many of the other photo image editing programs do not have a Resample Image box. Google “Image format converter freeware” and you will find “IrfanView and Paint.net. You can change the image resolution with these programs.)

Step 4.

After completing these checks, move up to the “Document Size” area and change the resolution to 300 dpi/ppi if it does not read 300 already. This will probably provide a height x width image in the range of 4x6 inches to 5x7 inches. Notice the pixel dimensions at the upper portion of the Image Size box did not change. This will allow the same amount of pixels to be squeezed into a much smaller area than before you changed the resolution. At 72 dpi, the image was 21x28 inches. If your prospectus ever requires a specific number of pixels, change the format from “inches” to “pixels”.

Step 5.

While you are at the "Image" location, don't forget to rotate your image for the correct orientation, and at the same place you will find "Straighten Image". You need to make sure your image is straight before you go to the next step.

Step 6.

On the sidebar, select the "dotted rectangle" which is the "crop tool" and place the rectangle around the outside edges of the painting. This will crop out the mat or any background that might show in your image. After you finish, go to Image Menu and select "crop" which will take out anything that is not the actual painting.

Step 7

. Use the "Enhance" Menu to bring the photographic image in line with the original painting, i.e. adjusting the white balance because of poor lighting. Changing the artwork image digitally is NOT OK. In fact it could be detrimental. If your computer monitor is not calibrated as the one the juror is using, you could be hurting your chances more than helping them. Unless you are very sure of your skills, rely on your camera; it is usually more prudent than trying to change colors, etc.

Step 8.

Saving your work. Remember your image file must not exceed 3MB.

- You should initially save your file as JPEG. While in Photoshop Elements, Go to File, Save As, and Name your file as prescribed by the Prospectus. For example: ShepABeStillMySoul.jpeg. Save the file where you can find it; e.g. Desktop.
- You will be asked if you want to save changes to your original uploaded image before quitting the program, do not Save. Not saving the file will preserve the original file for you to use again.

Step 9.

How do you find the final file size?

- Close out of Photoshop, find the image file on your computer, highlight (don't open) the image file and go to File, Get Info (MAC), or right click for Properties (PC). If the file size is under 3MB, leave it. If it is over 3MB, simply re-open it in Photoshop; go to Save As and when the JPEG Options dialogue box page opens save it as a JPEG file. When saving your file, ALWAYS check the Baseline Standard box. Do not check the Progressive Baseline. If it is still over 3MB, change the quality setting on the JPEG Options dialogue box page to 11, or 10. This should decrease the file size and safely retain the quality.

Congratulations, you have successfully completed editing your first image for submission. I'm sure you won't have any problems doing the other two.

Now for the rest of the story

. Go back to your Prospectus.

Step 10

Review the Tutorial on the WSA Website to complete the Entry Form and upload your prepared images. All you have to do now is wait for the Juror's decision on who is accepted into the Exhibition/Competition.

- If accepted you will receive instructions regarding packing and shipping or hand delivery. The best advice I can give you is to have a good camera, software that you have taken time to learn how to use, and paintings that have passed your self-judging test (Reference Resources/Tips.) Respect your work enough to apply the Prospectus requirements precisely. Your artwork won't have a decent chance if you don't follow the Rules. You are a great artist.....learn the exhibition rules, keep entering your paintings, and succeed.

You are now ready to start your next painting...HAPPY PAINTING!