

NEWSLETTER

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Panoramic Images

I am sure we all have tried our hand at panoramic images; there is something nice about a wide angle picture of beautiful scenery. I recently took a series of images from my house as night was falling over the valley and created this using Serif Panorama Maker software:



I was quite impressed with this until I heard about a new piece of software created by Microsoft research called "Image Composite Editor". You can read about it [here](#).

You can download the program from this page but note that it requires Microsoft Visual C++ for Visual Studio 2013.

I installed the program and it is a little strange at first as it appears that after stitching the images together the result is rather piecemeal but after studying what had been produced it was relatively easy to manipulate the stitched image and crop the end result. I was very impressed with the picture so I opened it in Elements 13 and did the same enhancement as I had done on the previous image with the result as shown below.



I should mention these pictures are over 30 inches wide by about 15 high!

PCtransfer

If you are setting up a new computer, laptop or desktop one thing people often want is to transfer the content of the old machine to the new. Also if you are installing a new drive into an old machine transferring files and programs is usually desirable. This is where PCtransfer comes in, it is the best free and portable data transfer assistant for Windows XP, 7, and 8, can easily and securely transfer important documents, files, browser bookmarks, settings, photos, Skype chat record, and emails in Outlook to new Windows system. What's more, PCtransfer can quickly select and backup third-party programs and settings. You can easily restore programs and data with one click and use them in the new system just as before. Read a review and download the free software [here](#).

Photography errors

Every photographer makes mistakes when taking photos. I “attended” a webinar recently given by Scott Kelby (of voices that matter fame) who I don’t usually watch as he charges the proverbial arm and a leg for his seminars but this was a “one off” freebie and me being a cheap skate I watched it. I also used a screen capture program I have to record a couple of his epistles and here are a couple of tips to help identify and solve common issues that you may come across. Of course you can correct these using Elements but this is how to avoid the problem in the first place!

Wonky horizon

You're in position watching an amazing sunset and happily snapping away. But in the excitement you forgot to check that the horizon was level, so the resulting photos are all crooked.



Nice light, but you forgot the horizon!

Here is an easy way to fix a horizon that's not straight. Most photo editing

programs can either do this for you automatically, or you can have direct control by tilting the canvas in a program like Elements or Lightroom.

You may also want to turn on the electronic spirit level in your camera if possible. The feature is often called a virtual horizon. The guide can help you



level up your shot, and can often be overlaid during live view.

Many dSLRs have a virtual horizon feature that helps you keep the composition level.

White balance is wrong

Do your photos look a bit too warm or cool? Sometimes you can get odd casts in your photos caused by the camera reading the white balance incorrectly.

Automatic white balance (AWB) can determine the best setting for the situation, but often the best way to get it right is to set a custom white balance value.

You will need a white card or neutral gray card to set a custom white balance. A piece of plain white paper is also an option.



Taking a manual white balance reading can help make all the difference to the final result.

In the same lighting situation as your subject, take a photo of the card so it fills most of the frame. Then, delve into your camera menus and look for a custom white balance option. Select the photo of the white/gray card that you just took and set it as the custom reading.

Photos from here on should look much more natural. Remember to change the white balance back to an automatic setting (or do another custom reading) after you have finished.

Otherwise, for those photographers who shoot images in raw, you can adjust white balance very easily in the editing process without any loss of image quality.

Focus is not quite right

When you rely on autofocus, it's easy for the camera to get it wrong. Sometimes, your camera's AF system will want to focus on something behind or in front of your desired subject.



In this photo, my subject is in the background, but the AF system chose the foreground.

To ensure the system chooses the right point of focus for static subjects, change the focus mode to single point AF. This will force your camera to use just one AF point of your choice, rather than relying on the

entire cluster of AF points to find focus.

Choosing a single AF point will vary from camera to camera, so check your manual for details.

When shooting a portrait, take the time to check the focus after the shot has been taken. Use your camera's LCD screen and zoom in to the point of focus to ensure things look crisp. Unless you are going for an artistic effect, set your focus on the subject's eyes.

Images are not sharp



You've taken an amazing photo, but it's just not as sharp as you'd like. This lack of sharpness can be caused by a number of factors: camera movement during the exposure; subject movement; or the camera choosing the wrong point of focus when using AF.

This photo is soft and fuzzy, thanks to camera shake at 1/15s.

Unless you choose to create blur for artistic effect, there are several things you can do to get sharper photos.

- Increase the ISO sensitivity.
- Make the shutter speed faster. Ideally your shutter speed should be at least 1/focal length. So if you are shooting at a focal length of 80mm with a full-frame sensor, your shutter speed needs to be at least 1/80 second. For a crop sensor camera such as APS-C, then an 80mm lens is equivalent to 120 or 130mm lens (80mm x 1.5 or 1.6 which is the crop factor). So your shutter speed needs to be at least 1/125s to avoid shake.
- Turn on image stabilization either in-camera or on your lens which can allow you to shoot at a slightly slower shutter speed than the above rule specifies.

- Use a tripod where possible.
- Avoid shooting at very wide apertures like f/1.8 as this can affect the perceived sharpness of a photo, especially if focus is not spot on.

Well that is all for this edition, looking forward to seeing everyone soon.

One quick tip: Have you ever been typing away in Word, shut the program down and then realized you forgot to save your work? Well that happened to me recently and I found a great way of recovering your document. After you have closed Word in error open it again and click *file > info > manage versions > recover unsaved documents*. It's that simple!