Image Preparation for Electronic Competition

The NCC Member Handbook provides the official rules for entering monthly Electronic Competition. The Member Handbook is available on the Publications page on the nevadacc.org website. While you received a copy when you joined, the most recent revision is on the website.

First I will briefly review the entry basics. Then I will make a few observations about the process. I work with Photoshop, so my examples below will reference Photoshop features. Other editors will have similar options. These guidelines work for me. Your mileage may vary!

As a summarization, an entry may be up to 1920 pixels high and 1200 pixels wide and must be a JPEG file no larger than eight megabytes. Each entry must be submitted through the website interface no later than the end of the Monday before the judging. A one dollar entry fee per image must be paid by 6:45 PM the night of the competition.

If you can color (and brightness) correct your monitor before editing your image, you will have a better chance of having a properly projected entry. You should first work up your entry so it looks best on your monitor. Then the following guidelines may be used.

We have found that the projected image often needs some adjustment to the brightness and contrast due to the projector and the screen used. A good starting point, in Photoshop, is to **reduce** the brightness by 15 **OR MORE** and to **increase** the contrast by 8 to 10 **OR MORE**. I do this with a Brightness/Contrast adjustment layer. This should be done before resizing the image for entry purposes.

If you enter an image larger than the rules allow, the online entry interface will resize the picture down to the maximum size. It is not to your advantage to use this feature. You should be in charge of the resizing. I use the "Image>Image Size" dialog with the "Constrain Proportions" box checked. If your image does not resize to exactly 1920x1200 pixels, then one of the dimensions should be maximized. Don't worry about the DPI or the inches part of the dialog; work with just the pixel counts near the top of the dialog. Submitting smaller entries is allowed, but may be harder to judge.

After you have resized the image to the proper size, you probably want to do a modest sharpening of the image. Use your favorite sharpening tool, but don't go overboard.

While the JPEG specification may allow files with more than 24
bits of color information per pixel, NCC competition does not.
Normally when you use standard editing programs such as Photoshop
to make your JPEG entry, your file will not have more than 24
bits per pixel.

You may not simply rename other format files, such as PNG or
TIFF, to a file with a ".jpg" extension. You must save the file
in JPEG format and the filename must have an extension of ".jpg".
We will not allow the competition display program to perform any
file format conversion. You are responsible for doing the
conversion and generating a proper JPEG file.

During the JPEG conversion process you may specify a "quality".
Use 100% or "Maximum" unless the resulting image is larger than
eight megabytes. I've never had a problem with using 100%, but
check the converted file size.

I use the Photoshop "File>Save for Web" dialog to do the
conversion. I select the "Embed Color Profile" checkbox. I also
select the "Convert to sRGB" checkbox. This last step is not
obligatory as the competition display program understands color
profiles, but I have found explicitly doing it works well for me.

Entry fees must be paid by 6:45 PM the night of the competition.
If you can't be at the competition, send the fees with a friend.
If you don't pay, and no one is willing to front you the money,
your entry will not be judged.

This article was originally published in the January 2017 issue
of the Nevada Camera Club *Focal Expressions* newsletter. The only
substantive changes made since then was to change the
recommendations for image brightness and contrast adjustments.
The original suggestions of -15 for brightness and +10 for
contrast are now considered the least amount of adjustment
needed. Some people recommend closer to -20 and +15. Every
image will be different, especially if your initial work is not
on a calibrated monitor.

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