

Emailing Digital Photos

By
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We all have heard lots of complaints from people that receive photographs by email that are too large. And, I'll bet we send some that are too large as well. They are difficult to view properly and they take too long to send and receive. The first thing we have to understand is that digital photographs are measured in "pixels" not inches. Prints are measured in inches but today's topic is digital photographs and they are measured in pixels. The term "pixels per inch" has no meaning when we are considering how to resize a photo for attachment to an email. Ignore it if you see it on your screen. The visible areas of computer screens are measured in pixels so let's get used to thinking in these terms. The visible portion of my screen is 1024 pixels wide by 768 pixels high. Yours may be 800x600 or 1152x864 or 1280x1024, et al. So, if you send or receive a picture 2000 pixels wide, it would fill two screens or more and the viewer has to scroll to see all of it.

How do we get a photo down to a screen viewable size? The technical term is "resize" or "resample." The good people who wrote the editing software, thought up some great, arcane mathematical algorithms that we do not have to understand at all, thank goodness. Just go into the "Resizing" function of your photo editor and it will probably automatically be in resample mode. Look at the pixel portion and it will most likely tell you your picture is 2048x1536 (for a 3.2 Mega pixel camera) or some such number. That is way too big to email. I always reduce the largest dimension to 500 or 600 pixels. That gets the picture down to a size that will fit on almost any screen. How do we do this? Just *select* the largest dimension and type in "500." If your "Keep proportions" box is checked, the other dimension will change automatically. Those wonderful algorithms will know which 500 out of 2048 pixels to select. Trust them. Don't even look at where it says, "Pixels Per Inch" or "Height & Width" as they have no meaning for this purpose. (See discussion in the Pixels and Dots chapter.) Click on "OK."

Assuming that you have done everything you want to do to prettify the picture, the *very last* thing you do is "Sharpen" it. That's the subject of another chapter but it might be as simple as clicking on "Sharpen." Now, whatever you do, DO NOT click on "Save." If you do, you will replace your original and you never want to do that. Use "Save As" and give it a new name. Then you will probably be asked or have the opportunity to choose the format for saving. Choose "JPEG." That is a format that compresses the file so it will transmit more quickly. There are several amounts of compression to choose from – 1 to 10 or 1 to 12. The higher numbers represent the least compression and result in the largest files and the best quality. The more you compress a file, the more good information the process throws away. The lower numbers result in more compression, faster downloading speed and lower quality. I generally choose "8" as a compromise but "6" works.

One last piece of advice. It should have been first but sometimes I think in reverse. Most of us stand too far away from our subjects when we take pictures. So when you take a picture of your grandchild to send to your sister, Edith, think about whether Edith is interested in a panoramic view of your back yard or the grandchild. Knowing you *will* stand too far back, I have this suggestion: Before you start worrying about pixels, CROP the picture down to the subject of interest. Leave just enough background to establish the location but don't feature the background. Then apply the 500 or 600 pixel rule. These simple rules will make it possible for you to send photographs that are interesting and easy to view. (See the chapter on Cropping a Picture.)