



In this unit we look at what can be done with editing software.

Photo Editing Software

Firstly, let us clear the air, you might think it and I have heard it so often it's not funny, "I DON'T LIKE OR NEED PHOTOSHOPING, MY PHOTOS ARE OK!". Well some of the time that might be true, and hopefully a lot of the time, but I can guarantee that everybody takes some photos that need some form of adjustment, either cropping, adjusting light and contrast, or moving unsightly or unneeded objects in your image.

Just about every image taken needs some editing. Some people feel that when they press the shutter button they will end up with the perfect shot that will not need any alterations or manipulations. This line of thought is good for the happy snapper, the ones probably using their phone camera or an inexpensive point-and-shoot camera.

However, if you want to make your photos stand out from the crowd, keep in mind that no camera can produce a perfect shot. The following two images show what I mean.



The image on the left was taken with a Nikon D7000, a good quality DSLR, and is shown untouched. The sky was bland and very light grey, and because of a low camera angle we see converging of verticals, i.e. the edge of the building on the left is OK, parallel with the edge of the frame; however on the other side the building appears to be leaning back. Also we have an ugly telegraph pole sticking up out of the roof, and finally, the contrast - the left hand side of the building is nicely exposed with good detail, whereas on the right hand side it is slightly over exposed and the grass has little detail.

Using software, these problems can be corrected. Firstly, using Photoshop, I imported a suitable sky as there was no detail at all in the original sky. I cloned out the telegraph pole, adjusted the perspective to straighten the building sides and did some dodging and burning to balance the contrast then finally an overall adjustment of brightness and contrast with levels.

Cloning is a process done in Gimp, Photoshop and some other editing software, their clone tool allows you to copy part of an image and place that selection elsewhere, this image was easy to do as I selected a part of the sky and placed it over the telegraph poles. Dodging and burning are also two tools in those software programs, dodging tool allows you to lighten up small sections of an image whilst the burn tool darkens small areas.

It must be remembered that we are artists, no different to Rembrandt or an artist with an easel, blank canvas, brushes and a stack of paints. If he were to paint the old house above, would he have painted it with a bland sky, or with the left hand side of the building leaning, or a telegraph sticking out of the roof? I do not think so, so why should we end up with a shot like that and not correct it.

Of course we could try and emulate Pablo Picasso with something like this:



It also must be remembered that there can only be one correct combination of ISO, shutter and aperture settings to correctly expose an image. In reality, the images above really required two exposures, one for the darker left hand side and another for the right hand side, as it is so much brighter; any camera with a single exposure cannot handle both correctly in the one image. There is a technique called HDR (High Dynamic Range), it involves taking three images, one under exposed usually by 1 or 2 stops, a normal exposure, and one over exposed by 1 or 2 stops. Doing this definitely requires the use of a tripod to ensure the images are framed identically. The three images are then superimposed on top of one another in the editing software, the software then allows the photographer to adjust the light and dark areas by making the images transparent.

With software like this, you can fool your friends by putting your photo up against some foreign exotic landmark making them think you have been there, even though you have not left your lounge room. The images below, did I do a selfie in a studio or did somebody photograph me out side against a nice scene?



I often wonder when watching news on TV, are the reporters always in the middle of that war zone, or the other exotic locations they seem to be in, maybe they are, but it does give food for thought.

As well as Photoshop or Lightroom there are some other products available such as Topaz, Nics software and possibly some others that work hand in hand with Photoshop. I will talk about Topaz as that is the one I use. Topaz consists of a suite of programs that 'plug in' to Photoshop. Topaz can be purchased individually or as a bundle and has various programs that I find are very good; check them out at www.topazlabs.com. Below is a comparison of using Topaz Adjust which adds more punch to your image.



(l) original photo; (r) after enhancement

I used the 'Spicify' preset in Adjust 4 to improve the above sunset. The suite I have have

- Adjust 4
- BW Effects 2 for Monochrome effects
- Clarity
- Clean
- DJpeg
- DeNoise
- Detail
- In Focus
- Lens Effect
- ReMask
- Simplify
- Star effects

SO what software is there and does it cost? Firstly the cost usually relates to what, or how much you want to do with manipulations. Free software that comes with your computer will be Paint, it only allows very minor adjustments. If you have Microsoft Office (but not available on Microsoft Office 2013 edition) on your computer you will have Microsoft Office Picture Manager which does a reasonable amount, brightness, contrast, cropping, red eye reduction, flipping, colour adjustment, resizing and compression of file sizes is available. This does a lot for a lot of people, however, as with a lot of the lower priced software it does not support layers. I could not have played around with my selfie as I did above without layers.

The most widely used software, that most professional photographers use would be Adobe Photoshop. Adobe has now made their current version a subscription software where you will pay per month to use it. It is out of the pocket range for most amateurs. You might still be able to get an older CS6 model somewhere. Other software that is available, software that I have not used but according to reports seems very good are, in random order;

- CorelPaintshopPro
- Photoexplosion
- Picasa
- Pixlr Editorjust

to name a few. Do a search on the net for photo editing software. One I have just recently discovered is an online browser program is Pixlr Editor online, <https://pixlr.com/editor/> It is very good, it is FREE and does handle layers, almost like Photoshop. Other things we can do with our images is to create slide shows, using software like Windows Live Movie Maker or Windows Live Photo Gallery. These do a reasonable job, but if you would like to do more in the movie line check out ProShow Gold or ProShow Producer or ProShow Web from <http://photodex.com> they have a free trial to download and they work fully. However if you want to finally produce from the free version there will be a big yellow banner across the whole show. You will find ProShow Gold will do all you want, the Producer version is considerably more expensive but has more transitions, themes and some other options. I have used the Gold version for some years now and find it very good. I will briefly explain these later.

Activity 7.1

The cost of software can be quite daunting so do some exploration of your own and see what applications are available and that also meet your budget and are compatible with your computer. This may involve asking friends, checking out reviews in magazines or online, or asking.

Keep in mind that free software can be found on the Internet, and your computer might already have some useful tools that were included in its operating system.

Next week we will look at smart phones and tablets.