Sizing Your Images

You're preparing an entry to a juried show, and the prospectus asks for images that are "a maximum of 1024 pixels wide", or "high-resolution 300 DPI", or "fit on a 20" monitor screen". OK … now what?

Sizing images is one of the most confusing topics for artists entering juried shows. And every show seems to have its own specifications. In this article, I'll help you to understand the requirements in a prospectus and size your images accordingly.

Only Pixels Matter

Let's start by reviewing some basic concepts. Digital images are composed of many individual spots of color—or "pixels"—arranged in a grid. It is the number of pixels in an image that determines its resolution and the ability to show fine detail.

When an image is displayed on a computer screen, there is a one-to-one mapping of the pixels in the image to the pixels on the screen. The most common display is 1,024 pixels wide by 768 high. If an image has more pixels than the screen, only part of it may be shown (unless the computer resizes it).

Measuring an image in "inches" or "dots per inch DPI)" is important only for printed output. Neither applies to an image in a digital format, and it is a common misconception that 300 DPI means a high resolution image. Only the number of pixels in an image determines its resolution. If the image is to be printed, you can calculate the number of pixels needed by multiplying the desired size (in inches) by 300. An image to be printed 6" wide, for example, should have 1800 pixels across.

Now What?

If the show prospectus gives you a pixel dimension for entries, then skip to the next step and size your images. Otherwise, here are several tips to help you figure out what size images to send:

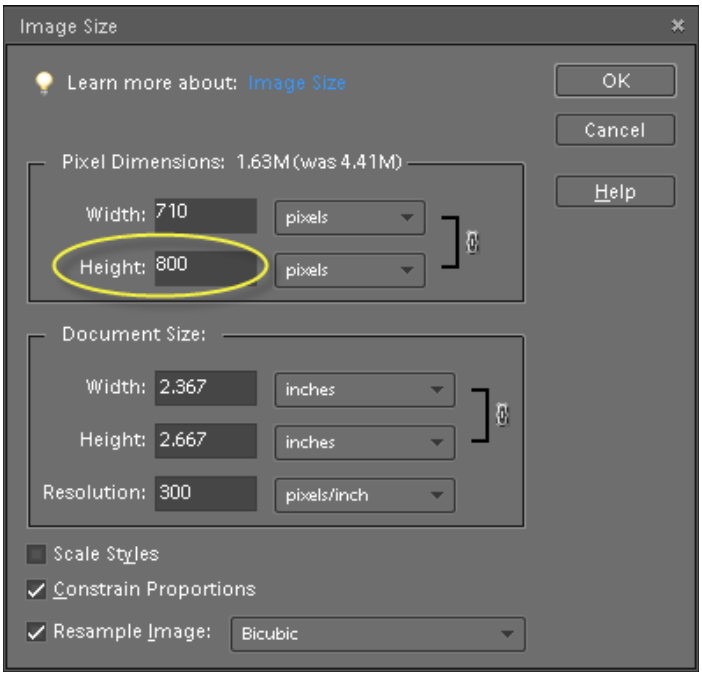
- If a DPI and a size in inches is requested, multiply the two together for the pixel dimension.
- If only a DPI is specified, then size the image to 800 pixels on the longest side. An image this size will fill most computer screens.
- If only a monitor size is given or nothing is specified, also use an 800 pixel size.

Size Using Photoshop® Elements

You can easily change the pixel dimensions of an image in Photoshop® Elements with the Image Size tool.

Start by opening the image you wish to size. Click "Image" on the top menu bar, "Resize", and then "Image Size" from the flyout menu.

In the "Pixel Dimensions" section at the top, enter the desired pixel size in place of the longer dimension (Width or Height). The shorter dimension will change proportionately—the "Constrain Proportions" box at the bottom should be checked.



The "Document Size" section in the middle can help you calculate the pixel dimensions for printing. Enter a DPI resolution of 300 and either the desired Width or Height, and the necessary size in pixels will be calculated in the top section. Remember, it is only the number of pixels that matters.

At the bottom of the window, check the "Resample Image" box. "Bicubic" is the default resampling method and will work fine for most purposes. Then click "OK". And be sure to save the newly sized image with a different file name (refer to the prospectus) so you don't overwrite your original.

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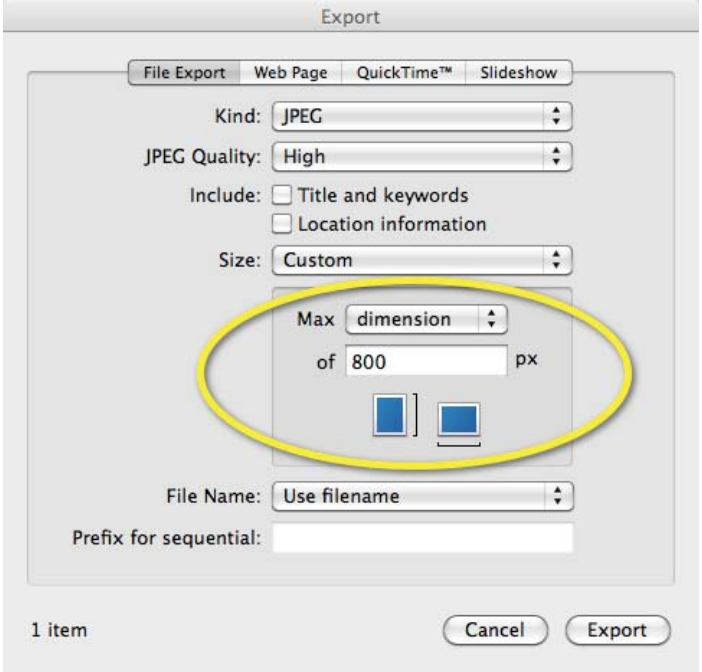
Size Using iPhoto

The pixel dimensions of an image can easily be changed in iPhoto by using the Export tool. Open the image you want to size, select “File” on the top menu bar, and then “Export”.



In the new window, click on the “File Export” tab, then select “JPEG” as the Kind of file to export (unless another type is requested) and “High” as the JPEG Quality. For Size, select “Custom” and enter a maximum dimension in pixels. Then click “Export”.

Attention Exhibitors

As an exhibitor, it is equally important for you to understand the concepts covered in this article and to include specifications in your prospectus that are understandable and provide you with the images you need in the right format.

If you plan to review the images on a computer, you should know its screen resolution. If not, you can easily find out by following these steps:

- For Windows XP users, right click on a blank area of the screen, click on “Properties”, and then on the “Settings” tab in the new window.
- For Windows 7 users, right click on a blank area of the screen and click on “Screen Resolution”.
- For Mac users, click on the Apple icon, then on “About This Mac, and the “More Info...” button. Click on “Graphics/Display” under “Hardware”.

Once you know how many pixels your computer will display, specify this in the prospectus as the desired pixel dimension. Remember, the screen is not square—use the smaller (vertical) dimension so that horizontal and vertical images will display at the same size.

If you plan to print an exhibition catalog from the images submitted, calculate the number of pixels required (inches x 300) and specify this in the prospectus. Again, use the smaller dimension so horizontal and vertical images are the same size.

If you want to learn more, browse the free tutorials and other resources available online in the Learning Center at www.ShootMyArt.com.

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