From the Editor

Hello,

Hope you all had a wonderful Memorial Day! I’d like to extend a huge THANK YOU, to all members of the military, past and present, and to their families. Your service and sacrifice are truly appreciated.

We’ve had some emails recently asking How to Save Digital Magazines to Your Computer. The link above is to a blog post that explains just that.

Thanks to those who entered our “Bokeh” Photo Challenge. It is always amazing to see how one concept can inspire such creative photographs by our readers. If you have yet to enter a photo contest, I encourage you to try it. Not only is it fun, but you might have your photograph appear in a future issue of PET.

Till next time,

Diana Kloskowski
Editor-in-Chief

Table of Contents

03 11 Mistakes You’re Making in Elements
Work smarter not harder and improve your editing skills with these techniques.
by Lesa Snider

10 Editing Wildflower Portraits
Editing tips to help you get the most out of your wildflower portraits.
by Erin Peloquin

17 Using Your Camera as a Scanner
Don’t have a scanner? No problem, learn how to use your camera to “scan” old photos.
by Larry Becker

22 Subscriber Showcase
Find out the winners from the Bokeh Photo Challenge.

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Each version of Elements comes with new features that let you work smarter instead of harder; however, old editing habits are hard to break...especially if you’ve been using the program for a long time. In this column, you’ll learn how to simplify your editing life and avoid several mistakes that siphon the editing flexibility from your documents.

**BASIC COLOR CORRECTION**

Camera Raw’s Basic panel (its icon looks like a camera shutter) has streamlined, slider-based controls for easy color correction and a handy tool for resetting the white balance. To correct your image, press I to grab the White Balance tool (circled) and then locate neutral white or gray pixels. As you move your mouse atop your image, note the RGB values (circled) that appear at the upper right. When they’re fairly similar, click to reset the white balance. Keep clicking until the image looks good to you, and then adjust the Temperature and Tint sliders as needed.

To correct exposure, press U and O on your keyboard to turn on the shadow and highlight clipping warnings, which outlines their icons in gray (labeled). Adjust exposure and contrast to your liking, and use the next four sliders to adjust detail in highlights and shadows. If bright red warnings appear in the image, indicating overexposed highlights, try darkening the Highlights or Whites slider (or both). If bright blue warnings appear, indicating underexposed shadows, lighten the Shadows or Blacks slider (or both). To increase contrast in the midtones, drag the Clarity slider rightward (avoid this on portraits as it emphasizes skin texture). To make your image look similar to a watercolor painting, drag the Clarity slider leftward (to see this technique in action, check out my Adjusting Clarity in Camera Raw video in the subscriber section online). To boost colors, use the Vibrance slider (it’s less drastic than the Saturation slider, which tends to destroy skin tones).
REMOVE NOISE

The Noise Reduction controls in the Camera Raw plug-in yield far better results than that of running Elements’ Reduce Noise filter. To use it, open the Details panel (its icon looks like a triangle and is circled) and press Alt-Ctrl-0 (Mac: Option-Command-0) to view your image at 100% zoom level (circled). Reposition your image to a noisy area by pressing the Spacebar and then dragging your mouse. Drag the Luminance slider slowly rightward until grainy areas become smooth (leave the Luminance Detail and Luminance Contrast sliders at their default settings). Next, drag the Color slider slowly rightward until color speckles disappear (you can leave the Color Detail slider alone, too).
SHARPENING

The Camera Raw plug-in is a great place to sharpen images, especially if you don’t need to do much additional editing in the Elements Editor. Unlike Elements, sharpening in Camera Raw affects your image’s luminosity (lightness or brightness values) but leaves color alone. Open the Details panel and ensure the image is at 100% zoom level. Adjust the sharpening Amount (strength), Radius (width of affected pixels), and Detail sliders (the level of detail affected). For scenic shots, try 40, 1, and 35 (respectively). For portraits, try 35, 1.5, and 15. To control exactly which edges are sharpened—all of them or just the highest contrast edges—Alt-drag (Mac: Option-drag) the Masking slider slowly rightward. Areas that will be sharpened appear white and areas that won’t be touched appear black. This is especially helpful on portraits because you can use it to avoid sharpening skin, as shown here.

NOTE: If you sharpen in Camera Raw and then open the image in the Elements Editor, make sure you don’t sharpen the whole image a second time.

When you’re finished editing in Camera Raw, click Done to close the image, which saves your changes non-destructively—just reopen the file in Camera Raw to adjust your edits or reset the image to its original state. Click Open Image to send the image to the Elements Editor or click Save Image to create a JPEG with your changes made permanent.

Use Smart Layers for images you’ll resize. Each time you resize an image layer, you lose a little quality. After as few as three size changes, or less depending on how drastic the size change is, quality loss becomes noticeable. If you need to experiment with image size—say, in a collage you’re making—import the images you’ll resize into your document as smart layers using the File > Place command. This puts a protective wrapper around the image so size changes happen to the wrapper and not what’s inside. The layer itself gets a special icon at the lower right of its thumbnail letting you know it’s a smart layer (circled). Now you can resize the layer until the cows come home, without making pixel pudding.
The only caveat is that the tools in the Enhance and Draw sections of the Toolbox don’t work on smart layers. If you try to use one of those tools, you’re prompted via error message to simplify the layer (remove its protective wrapper); just click OK to make it so. For that reason, be sure you’re finished resizing the layer before using those tools.

**Perform each edit on a separate layer.** Layers are key to safe and flexible editing. By color correcting on one layer, zapping blemishes on another, enhancing eyes on yet another, you can undo any edit whenever you want...even after closing the document (which is when your document’s history stats disappear). You can also lower the opacity of individual edits (layers) to make each change look realistic, which is crucial in portrait retouching.

There are many ways to edit on separate layers: you can duplicate a layer by pressing Ctrl-J (Mac: Command-J), you can duplicate the content of multiple layers by creating a stamped copy (more on that in a minute), some tools let you edit on empty layers (discussed next), and you can use adjustment layers. Adjustment layers instruct Elements to perform the adjustment, whatever it is, on a brand new layer. They also come with a layer mask, saving you the step of adding one if you need to hide that layer’s content from certain parts of the image (say, if you need to fix the sky but not the foreground). As a bonus, adjustment layers make it easy to duplicate the change onto another image—just drag-and-drop relevant adjustment layers from the Layers panel of one open document into another. To create an adjustment layer, use the half-black/half-white circle menu at the top of the Layers panel or choose Layer > New Adjustment Layer.

Adjustment layers naturally affect all layers underneath them in the Layers panel, for a kind of trickle down effect. To restrict an adjustment layer so it affects only the layer directly below it, clip it to that layer by clicking the icon at the lower left of the adjustment layer panel that opens (circled here in the Gradient Map panel). In this example, a Gradient Map adjustment layer was used to make one layer appear in black-and-white.
Use empty image layers instead of duplicate layers when possible. Some tools can function on empty layers, alleviating the need to duplicate the whole thing. This maneuver keeps your document size lean by having fewer pixels on layers—note the spot healing and clone stamp layers in an earlier screenshot—and makes it easy to locate the area you changed (Option or Alt click that layer’s visibility icon to see only its content). Position the empty layer at the top of your layer stack and use the Tool Options Bar’s settings (circled here) to turn on the tool’s Sample All Layer checkbox. This trick works with the Spot and Healing Brushes, Clone Stamp, the Content-Aware Move, and Sharpen tools. Unfortunately, the Fill dialog’s Content-Aware option (new in version 13) can’t be used on an empty layer, so be sure to use it on a duplicate layer or stamped copy instead (the latter is described next).

Instead of merging or flattening layers, create a stamped copy. Many tools and commands, including filters, only work on single layers. If you merge or flatten those layers, you lose editability. The solution is to create a stamped copy—a new layer that contains the content of visible layers (those that have their layer visibility icons turned on). To create a stamped copy, press-and-hold Alt (Mac: Option) and choose Merge Visible from the Layers panel fly-out menu at the upper right of the panel, or press Shift-Alt-Ctrl-E (Mac: Shift-Option-Command-E). Give the new layer a meaningful name (stamped copy was used here), drag it to the top of your layer stack and edit away.

Use fill layers. Instead of adding an image layer and filling it with a solid color, gradient, or pattern, use the Layer> New Fill Layer command. How is this exciting? Let us count the ways. First, fill layers let you experiment with other colors, patterns, or gradients; just double-click the fill layer’s thumbnail to reopen the Color, Pattern, or Gradient Picker. Second, fill layers come with a mask that lets you hide the fill from parts of your image, which is perfect for adding digital makeup, as shown in an earlier screenshot, or when colorizing a black-and-white image (in fact, if you create a selection prior to adding the fill layer, the fill is visible only inside the selection). Third, fill layers automatically resize themselves to match canvas size when you increase it. Here a solid color fill layer was used to create a reddish background.
Feather selections using the Refine Edge dialog box. The next time you want to feather (soften) a selection’s edges, don’t use the Feather command or the Feather slider in the Tool Options Bar. Instead, use the Feather slider in the Refine Edge dialog box. Why? The Refine Edge dialog box shows you a preview of what the feathered selection will look like, allowing you to experiment with different amounts. To do it, create a selection (the Elliptical Marquee was used here) and click the Refine Edge button in the Tool Options Bar or choose Select> Refine Edge. Make a choice from the View menu (white was used here), set all sliders to 0 and then drag the Feather slider rightward. When you get it just right, choose Layer Mask from the Output To menu and click OK.

Use layer masks for compositing and collaging. When you’re combining imagery, use layer masks to hide pixels instead of deleting them using the Erase Tool. That way, if you mess up or change your mind about the composition, you can easily reveal pixels you’ve previously hidden. When you delete pixels, there’s no way to get them back without starting over. To add a layer mask, activate the layer containing pixels you want to hide. In the Layers panel, click the circle-within-a-square icon at the top of the panel to add a mask (if you don’t see the Layers panel, choose Window> Layers). A white thumbnail appears to the right of the layer thumbnail; that’s the mask, which is a miniature representation of your document. Think of a layer mask as digital masking tape. In the real world, masking tape is blue or beige, but in Elements it’s black. With the mask active (note the blue border on the active mask; circled), apply black paint wherever you want to hide pixels. You could create a selection and then fill it with black, you could use the Gradient tool set to a black and white gradient inside the mask (as shown here), or you can use the Brush tool set to paint with black. Note that a Hue/Saturation adjustment layer was used to add a blue tint for color consistency across these three images (see how powerful adjustment layers can be?).
Save a master PSD file for editing. JPEG is a wonderful file format, though its lossy compression algorithm means that fine details get tossed in order to create a smaller file size. You’ll likely notice overall image quality loss on about the third generation JPEG, depending on the JPEG quality settings you pick. For example, let’s say you open an image fresh off your camera (first generation JPEG), you edit it, and then you save it as a high-quality JPEG (second generation JPEG). Now let’s say you decide to do some more editing so you open the second generation JPEG, you edit it, and then you save it as another JPEG (third generation JPEG). That third JPEG won’t look nearly as good as the first one. To bypass this quality drain, save the image as a native Photoshop document (PSD) the minute you start editing in the Elements Editor and then return to the PSD file for additional editing. The PSD format keeps all your layers intact in case you need to go back and change them later. Just choose File > Save As or press Shift-Command-S (Mac) or Shift-Ctrl-S (Windows) and pick Photoshop from the format menu. Then, when you’re finished editing and you’re ready to save the image in another format—say, to post online—save another copy as a JPEG or PNG from the master PSD file. By always returning to the PSD file for editing, you ensure maximum quality and editing flexibility.

As you can see, these methods can save time and produce infinitely flexible files. Until next time, may the creative force be with you all!
NOW THAT IT’S SPRING, THE WEATHER IS NICER, FLOWERS ARE BLOOMING, and parents everywhere resolve that this is the year they will get the perfect photo of their kids in the wildflowers. Easier said than done, right? Photographing kids in a field of wildflowers presents several unique challenges: the profusion of deep green tones can overwhelm your camera’s Auto White Balance, wind can make a mess of nicely combed hair, and skies blow out. Follow this tutorial to nip some of these common issues in the bud.

ON CAMERA TIPS
- Use a reflector to ensure that you get great catchlights in your subjects’ eyes. In urban settings, the ground often acts as a reflector to light the eyes – that won’t happen in a field of flowers.
- Shoot with a white balance card to avoid agonizing over which shade of green is the right one for your photo.
- Shooting early or late in the day is important. Otherwise, you’ll have deep shadows in eyes and blown highlights on hair.

1 Tweak Exposure. My wildflower photos almost always require an exposure tweak, especially if my image includes parts of the sky that I’m trying not to blow out completely. While I usually use Levels to adjust exposure, I like to use a Brightness/Contrast adjustment layer for wildflower photos because the Brightness slider doesn’t reduce contrast as you increase it. Since photos taken early or late in the day often are low in contrast, this adjustment layer is perfect for brightening without reducing contrast. In this example, let’s add a Brightness/Contrast layer, go to the Layer menu and select New Adjustment Layer>Brightness/Contrast. This photo required a Brightness increase of 38 and Contrast of 10.

2 White balance is next. I recommend adjusting exposure before white balance because it’s often hard to assess the accuracy of your colors if exposure isn’t right. So, now that I’m happy with exposure, let’s add a Levels adjustment layer (Layer>New Adjustment Layer>Levels) to adjust white balance.

Between the evening light and the abundance of green in wildflower images, you’ll find that the colors are often too cool. To offset the cool temperature, I add both Red and Yellow to the image on this Levels layer.

Add Red by selecting Red from the channel menu and moving the middle slider to the left.

To add yellow (which is the same as reducing Blue from Elements’ perspective), select the Blue channel and move the middle slider to the right.

To complete the color edit, move the middle slider to the left on the Green channel to add Green. Adding Green is another common fix for wildflower photos because our cameras can get confused when they find so much green in an image. The sensor thinks that some of that green should be gray and takes away the color that we want to celebrate in the first place.
3 Pop those colors! Now we come to the fun part. Let’s take advantage of the beautiful colors found in this field of wildflowers. For this photo, let’s saturate everything using a Hue/Saturation adjustment layer (Layer>New Adjustment Layer>Hue/Saturation and increase Saturation to 13.

Next, let’s make the greenery just as vibrant as I remember it being when I took the photo. Add a second Hue/Saturation layer (Layer>New Adjustment Layer>Hue/Saturation), select the Yellow Channel from the Channel drop-down menu and increase Saturation to 16. Yellow makes up a surprisingly large component of plants, and boosting it is often the most effective way to boost green.

Now, select the Green channel and darken it by moving the Lightness slider to -40. This deepens the greens in the image and gives them the vibrance and contrast that I remember.

4 Fill in the shadows. Even with a reflector, you might find shadows on your subject. A quick Levels layer can lighten shadows on the face and brighten the eyes. Go to Layer>New Adjustment Layer>Levels. On the RGB channel, move midtones over until the shadows are lifted to suit the photo. You’ll want to mask this layer so that you aren’t brightening the entire image.
To mask, let’s begin by making your layer mask black to hide the lightening everywhere. Click on the mask to activate it for editing then type Ctrl-I (Mac: Command-I) to invert the mask. Next, select the Brush tool (B) and with white as your foreground color (D, X), paint over the areas of the photo that you’d like to lighten. In this case, I lightened the inner iris of each eye. You can see the area I masked in the screen shot above.

5 Darken hotspots. Now, let’s work on a retouching need that is common in outdoor photos – hotspots on the skin. We’ll paint over these areas with a light flesh-colored brush. First, select the Background layer and add a new blank layer above it (Layer>New>Layer). Activate the Brush tool (B), change its Blend Mode to Color and its Opacity to about 30%.

Hold down the Alt button on your keyboard (Mac: Option) to change your brush to an eyedropper. With the eyedropper, click on an area of skin close to the bright hotspot to change the color of your brush to this skin tone. Release the Alt or Option key and paint over the hotspot once or twice until the color looks normal.

6 Make the most of the sun in your image by adding a golden, hazy glow with a Levels Adjustment Layer (Layer>New Adjustment Layer>Levels). Brighten midtones on the RGB channel by moving the middle slider to the left. Next, select the Blue channel and move the middle slider to the right to increase the yellow in the sunlit areas of your image. If you’d like additional warmth, add a bit of Red by moving the middle slider on the Red channel to the left.
It’s best to apply this edit to your mask with the Gradient tool to mimic the effects of the sun fading out across your image. Click on the layer mask of this layer to make it active for editing. Select the Gradient Tool (G) and drag on your image from where you want the “sun” to be brightest to the spot where you’d like it to fade away completely. You can see my mask represented in the image below. In addition to using the Gradient tool, I also selected the Brush tool (B) at about 30% opacity to add some rim light behind her head.
7 Calm the winds. Although not needed in the previous example, as the last step in your edit, clean up any hair that’s been messed up by the wind. You can also remove utility lines or other background distractions with this step. First, add a new layer by clicking on the Background layer to activate it, then going to Layer>New>Layer from Background. Select the Spot Healing Brush tool (J) and brush over flyaway hair or other distractions.

You can move hair that’s blown far from the head, as in this photo, using the Liquify tool. Go to Filter>Distort>Liquify and choose the Warp tool at the top left corner of the Liquify dialog box. With a brush about as large as the area of hair you are moving, put the center of the brush over the hair and push it back towards the head.
Bring out the blues in the sky. Elements gives us a couple of tools that help us emphasize the sky, or add blue to a blown out sky.

I start my sky popping with a Hue/Saturation layer (Layer>New Adjustment Layer>Hue/Saturation). Targeting the Cyan channel, increase the Saturation to 60. And on the Blue channel, increase the Saturation to 58.

Next, I added a Gradient Fill layer (Layer>New Fill Layer>Gradient). If you add a Gradient Fill layer, you will see this dialog (with different colors in the gradient bar):

Edit the gradient so that it adds good color for your sky. Begin by clicking on the Foreground to Transparent Preset, and then double-click on the Color Stop on the bottom left corner of the Gradient Bar to bring up the Color Picker dialog.
Once the Color Picker is visible, your cursor will become an eyedropper when you hover it over your image. Click on a shade of blue already in the sky that you like, and then click OK twice. If there is no blue in the sky, select a light blue in this box.

You’ll have a blue gradient over your image now. Mask it to the sky only by clicking on the layer mask to activate it for editing. Select the Brush tool and at 100% Opacity with black as the foreground color, paint over all the non-sky parts of your photo to hide the blue from these areas.

Approach your wildflower portrait edits just like you would any other photo. Assess the problem areas, and think about those that might be unique to the location or shooting conditions. After you’ve corrected any problems, emphasize the gorgeous colors of the flowers and sky for a beautiful portrait that you’ll treasure forever.

Erin Peloquin is a professional photographer and Elements and Lightroom Instructor. View her portfolio at TimeInACamera.com and her wide range of Elements and Lightroom classes and tutorials at TexasChicksBlogsAndPics.com.
 WHEN IT COMES TO GETTING IMAGES INTO OUR COMPUTERS FOR EVERY DAY USAGE, THERE HAVE BEEN THREE DISTINCT PHASES OVER TIME. THE FIRST PHASE WAS WHEN BLACK & WHITE SCANNERS WERE USED, MOSTLY BY GRAPHICS PROFESSIONALS. PHASE TWO WAS COLOR SCANNERS AND PRINTERS USED BY PROS AND EVENTUALLY CONSUMERS. And phase three, these days, scanners are starting to become less a part of digital image input since we all have digital cameras. Most people no longer have scanners but DO have digital cameras, even on our phones, getting our old images into our computers for restoration no longer requires going to the FedEx office or our friend’s office to use their scanners. We can use our digital cameras.

I’ve used my cameras on countless occasions to “scan” in and restore old family photos and there are a number of tips and tricks that will help make camera capture “scanning” turn out better. We’ll go through techniques for photo image capture, we’ll cover lighting, and I’ll show you what special considerations are related to various kinds of digital cameras. There are lots of tutorials about photo restoration, so our primary focus will be on getting the images into the computer using your camera, no matter what kind of digital camera you have, even a cell phone camera.

There are several things to consider when you’re capturing flat image originals with any camera. These include your camera lens type, distance from your camera, your light source(s), the material on which your original photo is printed, and holding the camera still enough to capture the sharpest possible image.

FOCAL LENGTH AND DISTANCE FROM THE CAMERA

Most everybody knows what an image looks like with a super wide-angle, fish-eye lens. It looks bloated and distorted and lines that should be straight look curved. But as your view gets less wide angle, those straight lines look less curved. Even when curved lines are not especially pronounced, they can still be there and distort your image. This is the reason so many “selfies” make people look like they have giant, balloon-like heads. I always tell people with almost any point and shoot camera or even pro quality DSLRs with a zoom lens, portraits will look more natural if you step back a little and zoom in. The same is true when you’re shooting pictures of photographs with your digital camera. Step back a bit and zoom in to minimize the likelihood of barrel distortion. So that’s a good, general rule.

For example, I used an extreme wide-angle zoom lens that is wider than most people would ever use for a portrait. It’s a Tamron 15-30mm wide-angle zoom lens, and first I used the 15mm setting to shoot a test image, then I stepped back a little and used the 30mm focal length. Granted, this isn’t really a portrait lens, and even the 30mm end of this zoom is a bit dramatic for a portrait, but my idea here is to show the extremes so you can see what’s happening with the wide-angle distortion.
There are exceptions to this distortion “rule.” Some wide-angle lenses have minimal distortion. And there are even special lenses that are designed to capture straight lines accurately. But the best thing to do is be aware that your camera and lens might distort your image, so you can minimize or avoid issues up front. You can even set up a make-shift test to see how much distortion your camera delivers. Just take a picture of a piece of notebook paper, which pretty much fills your image area. Graph paper would be even better. Look for bent lines in the middle and near the edges of your image.

The other thing is to simply be aware of perspective. That way you’ll be sure to set up your camera as close to the middle of the picture you’re “scanning,” so perspective doesn’t make your image look tapered.

Then step back and zoom in and see if you can minimize bent lines.
The good news is that most camera and lens combinations, even cell phone cameras, won’t distort flat images a great deal. People look more distorted in selfies because they’re 3 dimensional, but flat pictures that you’re shooting will have less distortion because they’re flat.

**LIGHT SOURCES**

There are two roles light will play when you’re scanning with your camera. The color of the light will influence the colors of the image you’re shooting; and, the angles and intensity of your light sources could make some of your scanned subject look lighter or darker. Cast shadows can be a real problem, and so can multiple types of light.

If you’re taking a picture of (scanning) a black & white photo, then the types of light are less important. Lighting with a slight warm (orange) tone or slight cool (blue) tone won’t really influence the colors in the image because during image processing in Photoshop Elements, you can just pull out all the colors and adjust brightness and contrast to improve the image. But if you have a color image and you shoot it in a room where there’s mixed light (like fluorescent and tungsten) it’s possible you’ll get some inaccurate colors captured by your camera. Whenever possible, the best approach is to have all your light sources be the same type.

Next, you need to put your subject (photograph) some place where there is even light falling on it. The top left should be just as bright as the lower right. And watch for shadows created by you and your camera as you get into position to shoot. This is especially likely to be a problem if your light is ceiling light and your image is flat on a table or floor. It’s often best to prop your image up nearly vertically so you don’t cast shadows on the image. At that point the top of your image may be slightly brighter than the bottom edge, but that smooth gradation from top to bottom is easier to fix in Photoshop Elements than irregularly shaped shadows. This image shows uneven light and there’s even a bad highlight.

**CONSIDER THE ORIGINAL PHOTOGRAPH MATERIALS**

When it comes to glossy vs matte prints, I’d rather shoot a glossy print every time. That’s because most matte prints are printed on textured paper and the texture is essentially thousands of tiny half spheres/bumps. Think about every shiny ball you’ve ever seen. They all have a shiny spot (specular highlight) and fading brightness across the rest of the sphere. That means, in almost every single lighting situation, textured, matte photos will have a moiré pattern when you photograph them. They’ll look like the image is made up of a grid. Even high-end flatbed scanners have problems with these kinds of scans and there’s almost no way to avoid the problem. Even special software filters that claim to fix the problem do no better than simply slightly blurring the image to minimize the grid’s appearance. I’m telling you all this so you don’t have false expectations of being able to reproduce those matte images with the same high fidelity you can when photographing a smooth, glossy print.

With glossy prints, all you have to do is make sure you minimize any highlight reflections. With smooth photos, which are on un-textured matte paper, you should have the least problems of all.

A couple of other kinds of images that are even more challenging than textured matte paper are images that have been printed with ink. Whether it’s a newspaper or magazine photo, or a picture from someone’s inkjet, all those images are made up of dots of ink. Sure, some photo printers have very tiny dots, but if you want to make high-resolution reproductions, you’ll see moiré pattern interference in those images as well and like before, the only thing you can do is slightly blur the image to make the pattern go away.
CAMERA SETTINGS
When it comes to the images you're capturing, your camera should be set to capture RAW if possible, so you can do all your own processing in the Camera Raw module of Photoshop Elements. If you only have JPEG available on your camera, be sure to minimize any special filters that get applied to images as you shoot.

If you're enough of a photography enthusiast to use manual white balance, do it and you'll capture more accurate colors for your reproduction. If not, go ahead and use auto white balance, but if it's possible, have something white in your image area so you have a good reference for adjusting your white balance during post processing. For example, look at the difference in the images below when I put this image on a piece of white poster board to shoot it, and I can color balance against the white background.

Be sure to disable your camera's flash because that will almost always splash light onto your image far too aggressively and unevenly. This includes cell phone cameras with those LED flashes.

If you have a tripod, use it.

Minimize camera movement to capture even sharper images. And speaking of minimizing movement, if your camera has in-body image stabilization, or if your lens has Image Stabilization (IS) or Vibration Reduction (VR) and you are using a tripod, turn off VR or IS.
That's because these systems are meant to defeat slight handheld movements of your camera but they have been known to add movement to a camera that's too still.

A FEW CONSIDERATIONS FOR CELL PHONE CAMERAS

Be sure to hold the camera as still as possible and don’t use digital zoom. Just do the best you can with the normal focal range. Take multiple pictures because cell cameras tend to hunt for focus a lot and some images are bound to be soft. Digital zoom just “guesses” what the image would look like if you were closer, but true detail is not added. You’re always better off doing that kind of digital zooming in Photoshop Elements if you must, but it’s best to avoid “blowing up” images at all so you don’t damage the details.

SUMMARY

Ultimately you can do a pretty good job with most cameras in nearly any lighting situation if you follow these general rules. And then, if you follow retouching tutorials here in Photoshop Elements User, you can even fix bad color balance, faded pictures, and weak sharpness to some degree. With a decent light and a steady hand, you will probably never even think about using a scanner again.

Larry Becker is a photographer and an instructor. He has taught Photoshop at the college level and conducted Photoshop Elements seminars for Adobe. His work has appeared on the sites of many major technology training companies.
Here are the winners from our Bokeh Photo Challenge.

**Window Glasses [ Photo Challenge 1st Place Winner ]**

Doris Pacheco  
Madera, California

Glasses in a shop window in Cambria, California. I processed this in Photoshop Elements 10 and used Topaz Simplify to smooth and saturate the photo.

**Blowing Bubbles [ Photo Challenge Winner ]**

Paulette Geiger  
Dahlonega, GA

A trip to the gardens on a beautiful sunny day was perfect for blowing bubbles. I adjusted the photo with Levels and added an edge effect in Elements 11.

**Celebrate [ Photo Challenge Winner ]**

Shirley Resnick  
Orlando, Florida

I took this photo at my kitchen table using a Sony A99 with a 50mm f1.8 lens. Red Christmas lights on a black background provided the bokeh “bubbles” and I used a raspberry water flavor enhancer to match the “wine” color to that of my “bubbles”. I used Photoshop Elements 12 to clean up some stray bubbles, adjust exposure and color and sharpen the image a bit. The Bokeh Challenge was so much fun, with endless possibilities.

Each issue we give you a new photo assignment. Winners are announced online. Our Upcoming Challenge Theme is **Beaches**. All entries for the Beaches Photo Challenge must be submitted by June 30th. To enter the Photo Challenge, go to this link and follow the instructions: [www.PhotoshopElementsUser.com/contests](http://www.PhotoshopElementsUser.com/contests)