

# Digital Slides For Juries Workshop

Wisconsin Alliance Of Artists and Craftspeople  
by Michael Bailey

April 5, 2008



Most pocket digital cameras with a fixed lens these days could be suitable for do-it-yourself photography of your art work. If you aren't comfortable doing photography, the recommendation is to get the work done professionally for the best possible slides. This goes whether slides are being created with film or with digital photography.

## What kind of camera

A pocket digital camera, also called point-and-shoot, with about 8 megapixels is good. Less megapixels means you have less of an image to work with. More does not necessarily mean better since more pixels are being squeezed into the same tiny space. Expect the cost to be anywhere from \$200 to \$500. Above \$500, you start getting into the DSLR range, which means interchangeable lens and even more complexity.



## Settings overview

Your camera should be set for optimum image quality, which means:

- 1) do not use auto settings
- 2) set your camera for the lowest ISO, 80 or 100
- 3) set your camera to make the finest or largest JPEG files possible
- 4) do not use flash
- 5) color balance, do not use auto, more on this later
- 6) use a tripod



## More details

ISO (International Organization for Standards) is the light sensitivity setting of your camera. The lowest setting, 80 or 100, produces the image with the least amount of noise or extraneous grain. If you use auto, the camera would probably select a higher setting and would produce a grainier photograph that would not be suitable for your purposes.

It's a rare pocket digital camera that produces images in anything but JPEG format. JPEG is a file standard that compresses the image before saving it. Digital cameras with removable lenses will usually allow you to save images in RAW format, which means you have more editing options in photo editing programs. Here, we'll assume you are working with a pocket digital camera producing JPEG files. Make sure that you have your camera set to produce the largest, most detailed JPEG possible. *As soon as you start to edit the file with any external photo editor, change this to TIFF or PSD format, which means you can edit and save the file without compression damage. Whenever a JPEG is saved, the file is compressed again and information is lost, thrown away.*

By default, usually the only color profile used by pocket digital cameras is sRGB, a basic standard. This is also the basic color profile understood by most viewing devices. If a choice is given, this should be the setting. A color profile allows different devices, such as cameras, projectors, printers, and computers to understand the color information when it goes from one device to another. It also means a jury should see what you see when viewing your digital slide.

Lighting is critical, as is the background. A monotone background or a graduated gray or white background is best. A smooth, non-textured surface is also best, but you might be able to get by with fabric. At minimum you want to have two equal light sources set at 45 degree angles from the art work on either side of your camera. This avoids glare as much as possible. If you use halogen lamps, your camera should be set at the incandescent setting. If you use indoor daylight fluorescent bulbs you should set your camera to daylight setting.



Uniform lighting is important, but do not have the intensity too bright, as this will wash out your art work. Do not use the camera's flash, which will cause a harsh photograph.

The first example above shows an overhanging sheet or umbrella, which can be a blanket or foam wrapping, between the subject and the lighting. If there is still too much intensity in a particular area, a second sheet could be added. Here the background is black, but that can be a different color, or a gradient background. An art supply store would be a good place to look for a suitable backdrop at a reasonable price. A photo supply or camera store would also have something, but at a higher cost since it would be a speciality item.

The second example above shows two fluorescent lights with daylight bulbs and a pocket camera on a tabletop tripod. The lamps are at about 45 degree angles and positioned far enough away from the target to keep the light intensity as uniform as possible. The backdrops in this instance are two sheets of foamcore, but white tagboard could be used. You can buy sheets of tagboard at any office supply store, book store or art supply store.

Always use a tripod! The reason for a tripod is to make absolutely sure your camera is steady. The most common cause for a blurry picture is camera shake. Any cheap tripod will help greatly. Also use a timer setting such as a two or ten second delay on your camera to further reduce any shake that might occur from touching the camera.

## **White Balance**

White balance is important enough that it needs to be discussed as a separate issue and some information from above repeated. If your camera does not know what kind of lighting you're using, your art work colors will turn out wrong. If your light source is tungsten or halogen lamps, the indoor setting on your camera, usually a light bulb icon, should work.

In the example above with the two lamps and the desktop tripod, the fluorescent bulbs are daylight, so the outdoor, or sunlight setting is used. There may be a fluorescent bulb icon in your camera so you could try that and compare the results with what you see.

Many cameras allow you to do a custom white balance, which requires taking a photograph of a white sheet of paper that is lit by only the lighting that you'll be using. A menu item in your camera will allow you to select that photograph to let your camera accurately know what kind of lighting you're using. This is an area that can become complicated and confusing very quickly, but if you follow the basic principle and check your camera manual on how to do this, you should be okay. This is another reason not to use auto settings, because the only time auto white balance actually works is in daylight, outside, probably when you least need it!

## **Editing Your Digital Image**

This could well be the most complicated and expensive area. Software that adequately handles editing digital camera files can cost anywhere from around \$100 for Photoshop Elements to \$600 or more for Photoshop, now called CS3, version 10. Trial versions are available from Adobe.com. Paint Shop Pro X2 by Corel is another \$100 package. Often basic editing software will come on a CD with your camera, so don't forget to at least try that to see if it suits your needs. Another important consideration is that the heftier photo-

editing packages not only cost much more, but their computer requirements usually are far greater than the simpler packages, so they work poorly if at all on a basic computer setup.

A number of free software programs can be found on the internet, but usually you get what you pay for, with advertising thrown in. The most robust of the free packages is GIMP, which is capable, but can be quirky.

## Fine tuning

Fill as much of your image with your art work as possible since this is what it's all about, not the background.

Experiment. The basic guidelines are just that. They are known to work, but sometimes changing lighting positions slightly, or your camera settings might produce better and more creative results. The final slide needs to be as remarkable in both quality and approach as possible so that it not only documents your art work, but also stands out from all the other slides a jury is looking at. Preferably, your booth image should not contain people or signage.

## Resources

ZAPP [zapplication.org](http://zapplication.org)  
1920x1920 pixels limit; file size limit of 1.8 megabytes  
requires black background

JAS [juriedartservices.com](http://juriedartservices.com)  
2000x2000 pixels limit; file size limit of 2.0 megabytes  
width and height can be different

[dpreview.com](http://dpreview.com)  
Extensive and detailed camera reviews. If you want to avoid wading through all the technical pages, the last review page for each camera usually has a conclusion with image quality. Make note of any comments about noise, too, as this is *always* a significant issue with pocket digital cameras.

[bermangraphics.com](http://bermangraphics.com)  
Offers services from the most basic to the most complex, and many pages of preparation advice. Berman takes images straight from your digital camera and does complete workup for \$20 each. Will also prepare and make ready for an online service for additional cost. Is recommended by both ZAPP and JAS.

[artsmart-online.com/shopping/juried\\_art\\_show\\_entries.php](http://artsmart-online.com/shopping/juried_art_show_entries.php)  
Offers services and advice for digital image preparation. Is recommended by ZAPP.

[iprintfromhome.com](http://iprintfromhome.com)  
Reasonably priced and responsive service for creating slides from digital files. Turnaround time is almost always within 24 hours on business days.

Larry Sanders [www.juryslides.com](http://www.juryslides.com)  
WAAC uses him at the Winter Art Festival to do booth slide photography, but he also offers various services, including production of digital slides for juries.

Mike Bailey, WAAC Board of Directors; photographer.  
As a WAAC membership service, will answer basic questions relating to this workshop.  
[MikeBailey@mhbailey.net](mailto:MikeBailey@mhbailey.net)