

North Bethesda Camera Club – Photo Essay 2009

PHOTO ESSAY PREPARATION AND SUBMISSION

Once again it's time for the most exciting event of the NBCC year, Photo Essay 2009. This program will be held March 22, 2009 in the auditorium of Clubhouse II, Leisure World of Maryland. It will include selected photo essays submitted by NBCC members, plus a showing of the End-of-Year 2008 Essay (all EIC winners from the 2007-2008 competition season).

This document offers detailed information for submitters and participants. Questions should be directed to the Photo Essay 2009 team:

Stu Mathison (chairman)
Bob Dargel
Tom Field

Your essay entry must be submitted (typically on CD) for review by the deadline of Saturday, January 31, 2009. This version of your essay should be as complete and final as you can make it, and must include all the source files listed in the attached checklist. Incomplete work may result in your submission being rejected. Submit early in order to have time to work through any problems the team may experience with your files.

Selection of which essays will be included in the Photo Essay Program is a competitive process conducted by our most experienced essay producers. Each candidate essay is carefully evaluated and discussed by the selection team. Any suggestions for possible improvement are documented for the maker's benefit. Some entries may be accepted as-is (with only optional changes recommended), while others may be conditionally accepted depending on whether mandatory improvements can be made within a short timeframe. It is expected that some entries will not be selected, but constructive feedback will still be offered to the maker. Essay selection criteria include:

- **Variety** in the overall program. It is possible that some good essays will be eliminated in order to provide the greatest variety for our audience. The team tries to avoid redundancy at the time essay topics are submitted.
- **Image quality** and appeal. The Photo Essay Program is first and foremost an exposition of photographic excellence. Any essay should start with great photos, and an essay featuring mediocre photographs is likely to be rejected.
- **Essay composition.** Selected essays will demonstrate proficiency in the art form. New essayists should study and understand the article linked [here](#), and experienced essayists would do well to re-read it while self-evaluating their essay prior to submission.
- **Theme.** The essay theme should be coherent and interesting to the general audience. Most successful essayists spend considerable time and effort on developing and refining their theme.
- **Music** must be appealing and appropriate for the essay topic.



Numerous club members have offered to assist members in the creative and technical aspects of essay development and in the use of ProShow. We highly recommend that you start work early and take advantage of this assistance in optimizing your show prior to submission. Please contact Stu Mathison for referrals.

Program Objectives

Our overall objective is to replicate the successful elements of prior year programs, while making some minor improvements to the presentation. The individual essays will be consolidated into a unified photo essay program, with deliberate sequencing and a consistent “look and feel.” The audience will enjoy a single presentation by NBCC, not a one-by-one showing of separate presentations. The program will be organized to flow coherently from beginning to end, with a common menu and standardized author introductions. At the same time, we certainly want the authors to enjoy full artistic freedom and maximize individuality within their essays.

Photo Essay Participation

Each essay must be primarily the creation of one or more NBCC members. Non-member contributors, limited to the family and/or significant others of NBCC members, may supply a minority of the photographs and may assist in development of the essay. Such non-member contributors must be given appropriate credit within the essay, but will not be named as co-authors in the program.

Essay Length = 4:00 (maximum)

To broaden member participation and to keep interest levels high, the length of each essay (not counting introduction or music end credits) is limited to four minutes again this year. As a guideline, we suggest a pace no faster than six seconds per photo, so four minutes would require 40 or fewer images. Condense your available photo collection down to the very best, and make a powerful and concise essay from those.

Almost any music can be edited down to a four-minute passage, so selecting music should be no obstacle to this length restriction. Essays longer than four minutes will be evaluated by the jury as submitted, but will need to be truly exceptional in order to overcome the excess-length disadvantage.

Essay Format = ProShow

Essays must be delivered in ProShow format with all source files (executable is optional). All ProShow variants are accepted: ProShow basic, Gold, and Producer. Volunteers, as noted above, are ready to assist those without access to ProShow, or those who need some help with the program. NBCC members receive a discount on purchase of this software, though this is not a factor in its selection for the program.



Menu Thumbnail Photo

Please identify a photograph that will be used as a thumbnail image on the top-level menu. This should be a photo that best represents your essay. We expect this will be one of the photos from your essay, but if you have a good reason to use a different photograph, please provide it in digital format. The thumbnail format will be horizontal, cropped to a 4:3 aspect ratio. Please do not select a vertical image, or a wide panoramic image, for your thumbnail.

Author Introduction

The production team will create an Author Introduction for each essay, based on your input. Your Author Introduction will be presented immediately before your essay. It is equivalent to the Slide Essay introduction delivered live by the master of ceremonies in prior years.

Author Introductions will have a uniform look and feel, but of course the content will be individual. As was done last year, the introductions will be recorded by a famous radio, TV, and movie personality, NBCC's own Frank Herzog. We will develop the script based on your inputs: biography, artist statement, and essay introduction, and we reserve the right to take editorial liberties with your data. If you provide plenty of input, we can produce a good introduction; too little input will result in a sparse and short intro. This 30-second narrative will be presented with your photograph(s) and title text.

Your essay submission must include the following files for the Introduction portion:

1. **Author Biography and Essay Introduction.** Write a few sentences that introduce you and your essay to the audience.
 - a. The biographical portion should give only the most important point (one or two facts) of who you are as a person and a photographer. For example, what is your history and current involvement with photography, particularly as it relates to this particular essay? We suggest you consider what the audience might like to learn about you, the essay author. You could write a short artist's statement, summarize your most significant photographic accomplishments, or describe your particular passion for photography. If there are multiple authors, a little more time can be allocated but the portion for each author must be abbreviated.
 - b. The essay introduction portion should provide the audience some insight into your subject. Remember, many have never seen your images and some may not be at all familiar with the topic. Perhaps they will best comprehend and enjoy your essay if you provide a short explanation in advance – this is your opportunity. Or summarize your own personal connection to the subject.

Your Essay Introduction should tie into your Author Biography, so they flow together as a single narrative, concise and cohesive. It's hard to digest everything down to a few sentences, so keep it on point as it relates to this essay, and leave out the rest. Test it out on your family or friends and ask them for feedback. Please make the



effort to organize and edit as best you can. But you don't need to be a great writer, because we will develop our own script based on your inputs. If you provide much more information than can be used, it'll be up to us to select what stays in. Try reading your text aloud – if it's less than 30 seconds, we'll likely include all of your inputs. If it's longer than 30 seconds, something will be cut. We do NOT plan to review the final script with authors for approval.

2. **Author Photographs.** The audience wants to connect a person with the author name: who is that creative genius responsible for this masterpiece? We will project photograph(s) showing the author's face and perhaps some action photo(s) of the author at work. These photos will be shown as a mini slide show during your Author Introduction. The mini slide show will also provide something to look at while the biography and essay introduction audio plays.

Please submit one or more photographs of yourself as digital files. Your photos will not be projected full-screen in extreme high resolution – probably just a corner of the screen. So don't worry about image quality or vanity touch-ups. Remember, the audience just wants to recognize your face, so make sure your eyes are visible in at least one of the photos. If your face is squished against a viewfinder or facing away, we need additional shots. If a passport photo is all you've got, send it, but candid shots that display your personality are preferred. Do you have a photo of yourself with a camera in hand? How about a photo of yourself on location, or working to create the very images that show up in your essay? Optionally, you can also submit additional photographs representing your essay topic to be part of the Author Introduction mini slide show. There is no limit to how many photos you can submit, but we reserve the right to choose among them.

Titles Within Essay

The essay title is one area we feel authors may desire individuality, not standardization. For example, you may not want any title, since your essay immediately follows our introduction (which does include the title). Or you may want a title to appear after a few introductory slides instead of at the very beginning. We offer the following guidelines if you do want to include titles:

1. You can display the title along with a subtitle if you wish.
2. Your name should probably be included if you use titles.
3. Minimize the number of words for best impact – there is no need for dozens of words here. Remember, your Author Introduction will be projected before your essay and it can explain the meaning of the essay if you wish.
4. We recommend including your name either on the title slide or on a separate slide. Please don't use honorific prefixes and suffixes like Dr., Professor, M.D., Esquire, Her Majesty, etc. In this context you're a photographer – just use your name as you would sign it on a photographic print.
5. Please use a font (typeface) that is easy to read (e.g., not Olde English or wild script typeface).
6. Make the font size large enough to read, but don't use gigantic lettering which looks awkward and amateurish.



7. If your title text appears in front of background photographs, be sure there is enough contrast for the text to stand out. That is, select an appropriate font (fill) color, and perhaps use drop shadow or stroke to add contrast.
8. Feel free to use effects such as fading your text in or out. Consider giving enough time for the underlying photo to be appreciated alone without the text showing. We strongly recommend against such distractions as flashing text or garish colors.

End Credits

End credits are strongly recommended as the final slide(s) of your essay. These are an opportunity to pay tribute to your music source(s). The music artist and publisher deserve presentation of accurate and complete information. This also facilitates audience members purchasing the music for their own collections if they wish. Please include the official title as published, the composer's full name, any performance credits (e.g., London Philharmonic Orchestra), the album name (don't guess, look it up and get it right), and music publisher (usually the copyright owner). Additional information can also be included, such as dates. Example:

*Music excerpted from "Appalachian Spring" by Aaron Copland
New York Philharmonic conducted by Leonard Bernstein
Album: Bernstein Century (Sony Classical)*

There are numerous options for incorporating end credits into your essay, and we leave these to you. Or the production team can create the end credits for you based on information you provide. If you create your own end credits, we offer the following guidelines:

1. Include the end credits as part of your essay – recommended – or display them separately (say, after a short-duration black slide) at the end of the essay. Either way, the end credits will be a strong cue for the audience to begin applause.
2. Any audio (music or sound effects) during the end credits will likely be inaudible because of enthusiastic audience applause. If you want to use sound effects at the end of your essay, put them before the apparent end of your essay (e.g., before final image fade out).
3. The end credits should be displayed long enough for the audience to read all of the information (typically about six seconds, but longer if you have many words).
4. Use the text guidelines given above under Essay Title Slide (font typeface, size, contrast and readability, etc.).
5. Please do not repeat text from the essay title slide (e.g., your name) on the end credits.

Getting Help

The Photo Essay 2009 team and other NBCC members stand ready to assist you on a one-to-one basis with essay completion and fine tuning. Arrange and complete this collaboration well before the submission deadlines! We want the program to be truly excellent, and we encourage you to seek help if needed and to seek feedback from the



experts even if you don't need help. Here are some areas where we may be able to contribute.

1. **Artistic Critique.** Sometimes another set of eyes can spot improvements you could make, or can help you resolve some difficulty in your essay composition. For example, those who were not with you on a photo trip can easily recognize that a photo does not contribute to the essay theme, even though you personally are emotionally attached to the image. Any respected photographer could assist, but the most experienced essayists in the club would be happy to review your work prior to the formal selection process. And if you receive Photo Essay 2009 team comments you don't understand, please ask for an elaboration – don't just ignore them.
2. **Audio Editing.** See the ProShow User Manual and Photodex website for information on “fading and trimming” audio tracks. For more sophisticated requirements, we have access to an extensive audio production suite. ProShow provides very useful audio capability, but it's not always easy to use. We're happy to handle anything else you may need. The most common task is changing the length of a piece by extracting and blending portions of the original audio.
3. **ProShow.** If you need help with your work in ProShow, please ask. We can either assist you in accomplishing your objectives, or we can take over and complete things according to your instructions. Mac users can't run ProShow, but we've assisted many Mac users with successful ProShow essays in the past. And if you need help gathering the files for your submission (see below), we're glad to assist. We appreciate those who purchase ProShow specifically for the Photo Essay Program. While we hope it will be a useful long-term tool for your photography, it's not necessary for you to totally master the software right away. Let us know if there are some things you'd like changed in your essay submission, and we'll attempt it.
4. **ProShow website tutorials.** Photodex provides good tutorial information on its website. For example, see the “How To” section at: <http://www.photodex.com/training/howto/> and the “Tips and Tricks” section at: <http://www.photodex.com/support/tips/index.html>
5. **ProShow Enthusiasts website.** This site contains Tutorials, Tips and Tricks and Sample Photo Essays. Note that there are separate sections for ProShow Gold and ProShow Producer users. See: <http://www.proshowenthusiasts.com/>

Submitting your Essay

The production team needs all of your source files (see the attached checklist) in order to re-compile the essays into a single menu system. Having the source files also allows us to efficiently handle minor adjustments. If the production team entered your essay into ProShow for you, we already have the original files – just send us your updates if any. If you created the essay yourself in ProShow, please provide us the files listed below. We do not provide specific instructions since they will vary depending on your operating system and how you organized things. Generally, most Club members will provide us with a CD or DVD. These files together are too large for email. Call if you need any help.

1. All of the image files as used in the essay. The images, filenames and subfolders must match those used in the ProShow essay.



2. All of the music / audio files as used in the essay. Again, the audio, filenames and subfolders must match those used in the ProShow essay.
3. The ProShow control file (filename extension .psh). Many people create more than one version of the essay as they try different things – be absolutely sure to send us the correct version (usually your latest). This is the version that will be evaluated by the jury and possibly shown to the audience.
4. Optional: if you wish, you can also submit the executable file (.exe).
5. There is NO NEED to submit the ProShow cache (.pxc) or backup control files (.b01, .b02, etc.). Those files can be moved to the Recycle Bin if you wish.

ProShow software provides a very easy mechanism for collecting all of the necessary files. Under the “File” menu you will see a command called “Collect All Files”. If you click on this command, ProShow will open a window and ask you where to put the collected files. You can select “burn them to a CD or DVD”. Submit that CD along with your Author Introduction Files (see topic above).

General Advice for Essays

Music Source and Selection. Please ensure that your music is from high-quality sources – CDs or digital (download) files. Cassette and LP music will be quite obviously inferior when played back on the big auditorium sound system. We recommend that you avoid music that is dreamy and soporific, as your audience will soon be snoring.

Image Preparation. Generally prepare images as you would for an NBCC electronic projection competition (see: “How to Prepare Images for Electronic Presentation” at: <http://www.nbccmd.org/EIC.htm>). Be sure to read all the sections below, including Image Sharpness. During image prep, it may be desirable to remove distractions (such as telephone wires) and to perfect your compositions with the appropriate alterations. Unlike the photo competitions, there is no limitation on the extent of alteration you may do to improve your images.

Artistic Considerations. Review the comprehensive article “How to Create Photo Essays,” revised 2007-12-04, linked at: <http://nbccmd.org/photoessay.htm>

Transition between Slides. ProShow offers hundreds of special-effects transitions. These can be helpful to bridge dissimilar slides, but they can also detract from your photographs. Special transitions (such as “explosions”) can be extremely distracting and take away attention from your beautiful photographs. Overuse of other not-so-subtle transition effects (especially random effects) can also ruin your work. Exercise good judgment: use specific transitions for a specific reason, but don’t misuse transitions. The ProShow default transition is to have one slide “dissolve” gracefully into the next slide.

Motion Effects (Zooming and Panning). Slide motion such as zooms can be useful to direct audience attention. But zooms can obscure the good photo that you made because it’s constantly moving and fading. If you need to zoom way in to see something in greater detail, be sure to allow the audience time to see that detail by leaving it still on the screen for a while. We recommend against sudden, dramatic zooms, as they can be distracting and even disorienting for your audience.



When panning (e.g., scanning across a panoramic image), be sure the initial and final display positions of the photograph are good compositions. That is, don't display a bad crop of your image as the start or end of a pan.

Also, when using any of these "motion effects", it is best to use them in moderation. That is, zooming and panning a given image looks best if the zooming/panning amount is such that the motion is slow. For example, zooming from 90% to 100% will usually work better than zooming from 100% to 300%.

Captions. Avoid use of text captions or labels during the body of your essay. Usually such text is unhelpful in the essay context – this is art, not a documentary. If your essay would benefit from explanations, consider including them in the Author Introduction script.

Image Sharpness. To have sharp, detailed images in your photo essay, you must start with good photographic techniques, of course. Then, we recommend conventional sharpening processes in Photoshop (or equivalent). Finally, here is some special advice for retaining the original image sharpness in your photo essays:

1. Build your essay starting with images of the proper resolution. For example, if you will be projecting images on the NBCC projector at 1400 pixels wide by 1050 pixels tall, your images should have enough pixels to fill one or both of those dimensions. But if you were to downsize your images to 300 by 200 pixels, the image will look very soft and lack detail when filling the screen.
2. When panning an image in ProShow, you may need more resolution than for a still image. Every pixel on the screen should be derived from a pixel in your source file. So, for example, if you're panning across a wide panoramic image, the height of the panoramic image should be at least 1050 pixels to match the projector height of 1050 pixels.
3. Similarly, when zooming an image in ProShow, you may need more resolution than for a still image. Make sure you provide enough pixels to satisfy the greatest magnification during a zoom. For example, if you'll be zooming in to 200%, your image needs twice the pixel data as the projector: 2800 by 2100 pixels. That way, at maximum zoom every pixel display on screen originates from a pixel in your image file.
4. Don't over-magnify images in your slide show. If you zoom to high-magnification settings like 300%, ProShow will not render sharp detail, even though the detail is present in your original file. This is a known problem in the ProShow software, so it's best to avoid such extreme zooms.

Settings for Sharp Rendering in ProShow. The default settings in ProShow will produce soft images lacking the original detail. To improve the sharpness, try the following settings in the Output Options dialog:

- a. Check the Limit Rendering Size, and enter 2400 x 1800 pixels.
- b. Set image quality to 100%.
- c. Set Video Output to High Resolution and High Quality.



PHOTO ESSAY SUBMISSION CHECKLIST

Review your images before putting them into an essay:

- Every image in focus and sharp enough for big screen projection
- Every image clean (no dirt, spots, scratches)
- Every image well composed (note they do not need to be competition winners!)
- Converted to JPEG files at proper resolution and high quality setting

Review your essay:

- Read and implement the aesthetic and artistic guidance offered in the “How to Create Photo Essays” article on-line
- Essay run-time length is under four minutes (not including music end credits)
- End credits give complete and accurate information on music sources
- Implemented “Settings for Sharp Rendering in ProShow”
- Use “Collect All Files” in ProShow to produce a CD/DVD for submission

Submit on or before January 31, 2009:

- Image files (the exact files expected in the essay by ProShow)
- Music / audio files (again, the exact files expected in the essay by ProShow)
- ProShow control file (.psh) – be sure it’s the right version of your essay
- Optional: executable photo essay (.exe)
- Author biography and essay introduction (in a .txt or .doc file, hand written accepted if legible)
- Author photo files (self-portraits, in-action, on-location, etc.) for introduction in JPEG format

