

North Bethesda Camera Club – Photo Essay 2012

PHOTO ESSAY PREPARATION AND SUBMISSION

The NBCC Photo Essay 2012 program will be held Sunday March 18, 2012 in the auditorium of Clubhouse 2 at Leisure World of Maryland. For more information, see the article in *The Lens and Eye* newsletter, November 2011 issue.

This document offers detailed information for submitters and participants. Questions should be directed to the Photo Essay 2011 committee:

Stu Mathison (chairman)
Gordie Corbin
Judy Switt
David Davidson
John Pan
Tom Field

The team will keep the program at a reasonable length and uphold our high standard of quality. Therefore the number and length of essays in the program will be limited, and the essays will be selected on a competitive basis. Priority may be given to shorter essays.

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 candidates may be accepted as-is (with only optional changes recommended), while others may be conditionally accepted depending on whether mandatory improvements can be made before the final submission deadline. It is expected that some candidates 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 rejected in order to provide the greatest variety for our audience. The team tries to avoid redundancy at the time essay topics are submitted, and participants are encouraged to create unique and interesting presentations.
- **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 will almost certainly 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 are advised to re-read it while self-evaluating their essay during development.
- **Theme**. Good essays start with a coherent theme of interest 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. Soothing music can be a pitfall, however, as it becomes soporific and bores the audience into sleep.



Submission Schedule

The submission process begins with your proposal, due December 15, 2011. Send in a collection of 20 to 40 photographs you intend to use in your essay, along with a brief description of your essay concept (e.g., candidate title and a sentence or two about the theme, music choices if you have made them). There is no need to actually prepare an essay at this point. The best way to submit your images is on CD, but other methods may also be acceptable.

By year end, the committee will respond to the proposals and notify members whether or not to proceed with development and submission of a draft essay. Additional feedback may be provided, such as recommendations for refinement of your theme, music recommendations, and any advice on photograph selection or improvements.

Draft essays are due on or before January 31, 2012. These must be in ProShow format including titles, images, and music. An artist statement and bio (about 20 seconds spoken duration) and photos of the essay author (preferably related to the essay topic) should be included. All files in the attached checklist must be included – incomplete submissions may be rejected. Constructive feedback will be provided after the committee reviews the draft essays.

Final essays are due February 28, 2012. This version of your essay should be as complete and final as you can make it.

Numerous club members have volunteered 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 continuing to make 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 framework 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 Duration = Three to Four Minutes

To broaden member participation and to keep interest levels high, the length of each essay (including title slides and 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 less than 40 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 shorter passage less than four minutes long, so selecting music should be no obstacle to this length restriction. Essay candidates longer than four minutes will be evaluated by the committee 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 file 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. The final program is assembled into a project in ProShow Producer.

All shows will begin with a silent, blank slide (about 1 second) and end with a silent blank slide (about 2 seconds). These serve as spacers from one show to the next, and between an introduction and the essay itself. Please try to include these in your original essay design, but if you can't or you forget we **will** add them for you. Tip: delay the start of the music past the opening blank slide by entering an offset (typically 1 second) on the (first) music track. Don't forget that the opening blank slide also lets you transition in your first image, so it doesn't just pop onto the screen with no finesse.

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. Therefore, 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. This 30-second narrative will be presented along with images of you, the author. Author introductions will have a uniform look and feel, but of course the content will be individual. The narrations will be scripted and recorded by club members.

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, you might mention 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 include a one-sentence artist's statement, or 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 information about each author must be abbreviated.
 - b. The essay introduction portion should provide the audience any necessary 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 appreciate your essay if you provide a short explanation in advance – this is your opportunity. Or you could summarize your own personal connection to the subject. Be sure to provide some images of the subject or, better yet, yourself on location. These images will be projected while the narrator delivers the subject overview.

These two items (author biography and essay introduction) should tie together so they flow as a single narrative, concise and cohesive. Test it out on your family or friends and note their reaction. Please make the effort to organize and edit as best you can. Remember, we will digest what you provide down to a 20-second script, so keep it on point as it relates to this essay, and leave out the rest. We likely will take editorial liberties with your data, and typically we do not 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. These images are not artwork like those in the essay itself, but serve as a documentary of you, the photographer. Ideally they illustrate your relationship to the topic, such as snapshots of you capturing images on location.

Please submit one or more photographs of yourself as digital files. Your photos might not be projected full-screen in extreme high resolution – perhaps 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? Additionally, you can



submit photographs illustrating your essay subject, simple map, etc. There is no limit to how many images you can submit.

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. For a professional look, integrate any titles smoothly with the flow of the essay – not just a text slide jammed into the front. We offer the following guidelines if you do want to include titles:

1. Titles are optional. Avoid repeating the same information as the author introduction, which the audience will have just viewed.
2. A simple title along with a subtitle can be effective.
3. Minimize the number of words for best impact – don't expect the audience to read much, and 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.
4. Your name should probably be included if you use titles. 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. Opening title slides can be more interesting when they include background photographs. But watch out for some pitfalls. Ensure the text contrasts with the background so it's easily readable, and perhaps use drop shadow or stroke to add contrast. Consider displaying the text only part of the slide duration, so the audience can also appreciate the background image.
8. Text effects such as fading in or out can be very classy, but more extreme effects such as spinning exits should be used with caution to avoid the amateur look.
9. Avoid displaying any text in the middle of the essay, as captions on your photographs may ruin the visual spell your photographs were weaving over the audience.

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 2011 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 instantly 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 2011 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 seamlessly 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 project with menu. We may also make minor adjustments to your essay. 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, but you can email the ProShow control file (filename.psh). Call if you need any help.

1. Submit all of the image files as used in the essay. The images, filenames and subfolders must match those used in the ProShow essay. If you used Collect Files, your images will all be in a subfolder called image.
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. If you used Collect Files, your music and sound files will all be in a subfolder called audio.
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 committee and possibly shown to the audience.
4. Optional: if you wish, you can also submit the executable file (.exe). We rarely use it, since we make our own executable first thing (to make sure your files are all here).
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, and it won't affect your essay.

ProShow software provides a very easy mechanism for collecting all of the necessary files. Under the "File" menu (note: now moved to the "Tools" menu in ProShow 5) 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). Or bring the files to us on a USB drive.

General Advice for Essays

Music Source and Selection. Your music should be the soundtrack to your excellent photographs. It is not “background music.” Background music is for elevators and putting people to sleep. We strongly recommend that you avoid music that is dreamy and soporific, as your audience will soon be snoring and miss your fine photography. Music with long quiet passages will be “lost” in the big auditorium, causing your audience to disconnect from your show. Pick music that attracts and holds interest.

Please ensure that your music is from high-quality sources – CDs or good digital (download) files. If you capture music from CDs using ProShow, please do not use the ProShow default “OGG” format: it is difficult to work with and sometimes exhibits audible defects. Instead, choose highest quality MP3 format in ProShow, ideally 320kpbs stereo.

Digitized music from cassette or LP records will be quite obviously inferior when played back on the big auditorium sound system, and may be rejected during essay review. Music downloaded from iTunes and other on-line sources is acceptable, though these tend to be lower fidelity than a top-quality MP3. Some auditoriums do not have stereo sound reproduction, so please don’t depend on left/right effects.

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.

Image Size for Panning and Zooming. If you will be using motion effects (zooming and panning), you may need higher resolution in your source image. For example, if you’ll pan left to right one full frame, then your width should be 2800 pixels (twice the projector width of 1400 pixels). Because ProShow compresses big images (to reduce file size and prevent stuttering on slower computers), we recommend you NOT zoom beyond 200% or so. The resulting image quality will deteriorate noticeably, with loss of detail that was perfectly clear in your original image file.

Artistic Considerations. Review the comprehensive article “How to Create Photo Essays,” 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 seem designed for the small, low-resolution monitors common in the last decade. They will produce soft images lacking the original detail when displayed on a high resolution monitor or projector. The photo essay production team will render final essays in such a way to maximize detail, overriding settings you may have set on your computer. We typically use the following settings in the Output Options dialog (see note below):

- a. Check the Limit Rendering Size, and enter 2400 x 1800 pixels. This is counter intuitive, but leaving the box unchecked seems to produce soft images.
- b. Set image quality to 100%.
- c. Avoid zooming any image more than 150%, and assume any zooms beyond 200% will render soft results.

Sadly, ProShow removed the Limit Rendering Size option, so we no longer have control over the program's automatic downsizing of images.



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 (at least 1400 x 1050 pixels) 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 the submission deadline:

- 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

