

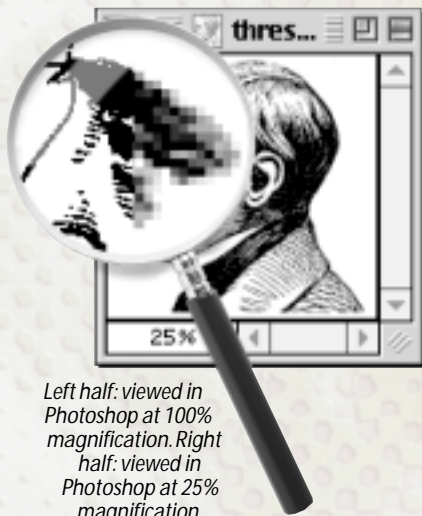
Fundamental Photoshop

Little things make a big difference when working in Photoshop

■ BY BEN WILLMORE

In our last episode of Fundamental Photoshop, we attempted to demystify the percentage that shows up at the top of your images. Now let's look at some of the snags you can run into when viewing at different magnifications.

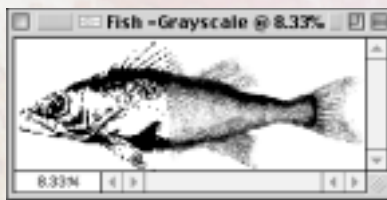
When you view a pure black-and-white image (no grays) at less than 100%, Photoshop doesn't actually shrink the size of the pixels that make up your screen. Instead, it has to figure out another way to display it, so it averages the info in your file and the result looks grayscale! Because of this, the only time bitmap images look correct is when you're viewing them at 100% or above.



Left half: viewed in Photoshop at 100% magnification. Right half: viewed in Photoshop at 25% magnification.

The viewing problem becomes compounded when Photoshop's adjustments and filters attempt to update your screen in real time. In many instances, it uses what's being shown on screen (the "averaged" view) instead of using all the pixels that actually make up your image. Remember, the only time the screen pixels are the same as the ones your image are made from is when you view your image at 100%. If you are viewing a 1600 x 1200 image at 50%, Photoshop is averaging that info to make it viewable using only 800 x 600 pixels. Then when you apply an

adjustment, it only uses what's on screen for the preview and applies the change to the actual image after you click OK. When that happens, the screen view is recalculated and that's why the final result is often different than what you saw in the preview.



The left half shows what it looked like while applying the filter, and the right side shows what it looked like after applying the filter.

So, if you need an accurate preview, view your image at 100%. When you want to see the whole image, one option is to choose New View from the View menu and keep one of the views zoomed out.

Magnification problems aren't always due to the percentage you use to view your image. In the Type dialog box, any view that is higher than 100% will be inaccurate. Try it and you'll see that the pixels never get larger. Instead, Photoshop just uses a different size setting. To see what's really going on, zoom in on your main image window, because that view will be accurate.

And that's not the only time you have to watch your back. Just try to use the Print Size option from the View menu. You'd think that would be pretty straightforward, but there's one snafu—Photoshop assumes your screen is currently displaying 72 pixels in each inch of the screen. I have yet to find a single screen that displays exactly 72 pixels per inch! To get an accurate print size preview, go ahead and start with

Photoshop's Print Size command. Next, turn on your rulers and hold up a real ruler to your screen to see if they match. If they don't match, then you're not seeing your image at the same size it will print. To get them to match, enter a new percentage in the lower left of your document window. Once you have the number entered, type Shift-Return so that Photoshop will update the screen and keep that number highlighted in case you need to try another number.

But you're not safe yet! There's one more instance when that view percentage can throw you for a spin. Open any grayscale photo, zoom out to 25%, and then choose Image>Adjust>Levels. Take a look at the bar chart (Histogram) that shows up at the top of the dialog box, then click the Cancel button. Now, view your image at 100% and take a second look at that bar chart—it's different! Why? Because Photoshop is only looking at what your screen is displaying instead of looking at what is really in your file. To fix that, choose File>Preferences>Image Cache and turn off the Use Cache For Histograms check box. Then Photoshop will always consider the whole image when creating a Histogram.

So keep that deceitful little magnification number in your peripheral vision, remember what we covered today, and don't let it trip you up in the future. ■

Ben Willmore lives in Boulder, Colorado and is the founder of Digital Mastery, a training and consulting company which presents the national seminar tour of "Master Photoshop in 3 Days." Ben provides hundreds of free Photoshop tips and tutorials on his Web site, www.digitalmastery.com.



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