

NEWSLETTER

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VLC Media Player

New computers include a media player like QuickTime or Windows Media Player. Unfortunately, these players can't handle every type of video file.

VLC is the best alternative around. It's a powerful yet lightweight media player that can handle almost any media format in existence. The latest version also adds support for multi-core CPUs, GPU rendering and experimental support for Blu-ray discs. It will play most codecs with no additional codec pack required for MPEG-2, MPEG-4, DivX, and WMV etc. players.

For full details and a free download go to: www.videolan.org

CleanPrint Browser Tool

CleanPrint is an economically and ecologically friendly print tool that saves paper, ink, and money while making your output look great. CleanPrint is activated by clicking the CleanPrint Browser Tool instead of the print button next to an article on a website. Before printing or saving content you can add a note, eliminate images, increase or decrease font size, and eliminate or grayscale text to save ink and paper. It takes a little practice to choose the text but it really works.

For a free download click [here](#).

Elements Shortcuts

Those of you who attended the March meeting may remember I covered some quick tips and keyboard shortcuts. Here is a couple more to remember:

- Press "D" to change the background and foreground colors to black and white from any other color combination.
- Press "X" to toggle the foreground and background colors.

- Click once in a value number field (such as a brush size and then press the up or down arrows to increase or decrease the value. Hold down the “Shift” key and the values will change in increments of 10.
- You can quickly change the Opacity of a Layer or a Brush by pressing numbers on your keyboard. 1=10%, 4=40%, 6=60%, etc. To change to a non-ten number just press the 2 digits really fast. For example for 57%, press 5 and then 7 as fast as you can.
- Close a window by pressing Control+W on a PC.

Clip Art

We all use clip art sometime whether it's in a letter (yes I still do write letters to people, put them in an envelope, stick on a stamp and drop it in a mail box!) or e-mail etc. and as you have probably noticed Microsoft has not added many to the Word or Outlook program for quite some time. There are several sites where clip art can be purchased but here is a site where a free daily example can be obtained:

<http://www.dailyclipart.net/>

If you would like some animated items then I would recommend a site I've used many times: www.feebleminds-gif.com which has a huge selection of items. Don't ask me where the name came from, sufficient to say the site is based in the UK!

You Tube

I have often mentioned Adobe TV as a good source of instructional videos for all of Adobe's products but You Tube also has a lot of useful videos. One thing that makes You Tube desirable is that the videos are easily saved for future viewing and they cover a huge range of subjects. Just type in “Photoshop Elements” in the search box and check out the selection.

Photoscape

I know we are mostly interested in Adobe Photoshop Elements but occasionally I run across a free photo editing program that intrigues me (apart from the “free” factor) and this is one of them.

This program supports RAW, as well as all other major image formats from JPEG and PNG to animated GIFs. It comes with prebuilt templates for users to create photo collages; Web comics etc., and has a standard set of red-eye removal, light/shadow,

and contrast-editing features. You can also batch edit images, combine them, and print them out one at a time or several at once.

The program loads fast and possesses an interface completely different from those familiar with Adobe's tools. It might take some people time to get used to the unusual layout, but it's only unusual for an image editor; otherwise it's intuitive, fast, and lacks only the most advanced of image editing features. It is #2 on Cnet's photo editing software download list and is worth a look for those who are curious like me!

More details and a download can be found [here](#).

Tips to Scan Your Family Pictures

In the age of digital photos, photo scanners are still around largely because most of us—or our parents and grandparents—have collections of old film-based photos. Most people would like to get those photos scanned, if they could only figure out how. If that's the boat you're in, here are some tips that can help.

1. Face Reality. Scanning photos is a time-intensive operation. Almost anything that speeds it up (other than buying a faster scanner) lowers scan quality. So pick the level of quality you want, and then accept the amount of work that comes with it.

2. Know Your Classes of Scanners. If you're still looking for a scanner, the balance of scan quality and ease of use should be your key concern. Unfortunately, the scanners that are easiest to use tend to have the lowest quality. That said, if you'll be satisfied with scans that are suitable for viewing onscreen or reprinting at the same size—although with noticeable color shifts and loss of resolution—consider using an inexpensive sheet fed scanner like the Kodak P461 Personal Photo Scanner (\$139.99 direct, 4 stars). These scanners make all the settings decisions for you so all you have to do is feed the photos through a slot.

For quality suitable for just about anyone but a pro, consider an inexpensive flatbed scanner, like PC Magazine's Editors' Choice and the model I have, Epson Perfection V300 Photo (\$99.99 direct, 4 stars). For still better quality, consider a more expensive flatbed, like the Epson Perfection V700 Photo (\$550 Street, 4 stars). Also keep in mind that for the best quality, you should skip the printed photo, and scan the original negative instead, if it's available, preferably with a scanner like the V700, which can scan 12 slides at once.

3. Scanners on MFPs Aren't Great. Most MFPs are aimed at scanning documents and are best avoided for photo scanning. You can recognize the few exceptions by options in their scan utilities that are clearly meant for photos, like a color restore feature. Even

for those, however, don't expect great quality. The best MFPs reviewed by PC Labs are in the same class as an inexpensive flatbed.

4. Choose a WIA or TWAIN Scan Drivers. Many scanners give you the choice of scanning with a separate scan utility or by calling up a driver from a program -- using Photoshop's File > Import command, for example. In most cases the interface and setting options are the same either way, so it doesn't matter which approach you take. However, you may also have the choice between using a WIA driver or a Twain driver. If so, the Twain driver will almost always give you far more control over the scan settings and better results even with the default settings.

5. Auto Mode Can Be Your Friend. Most scan utilities include an automatic or nearly automatic mode, the scanner equivalent of using a point and shoot camera. If you're in hurry or know nothing about scanning, the auto mode will usually provide reasonably good quality and may be all you need.

6. Fine-tune with Advanced Modes. If you want the best possible quality from your scanner, explore the advanced modes in your scan utility. The best way to get a feel for any given option is to scan the same image with different settings and compare results. For many settings, you won't even have to scan repeatedly. Simply do a preview scan, change the settings, and you'll see the effect on the preview image.

7. Use Restore for Scanning Faded Photos. Most scan utilities offer a color restore option for restoring color to faded photos. Most often, there's more than one setting, so you can pick the one that matches the level of fading. If your scan utility doesn't offer color restore, you'll have to fix the color in a photo editing program instead, which is usually much harder to do.

8. Clean Up Dust and Scratches. Many scanners offer digital dust and scratch removal features. Software based versions typically do some good for removing dust specks, but don't do much for scratches. Hardware-based features, like Digital ICE (Image Correction and Enhancement), do a much better job, but add to the price of the scanner. If your scanner doesn't offer a good quality dust removal feature, blowing the dust off your photos before scanning with canned air takes a lot less time than manually removing dust specks in a photo editing program later.

9. Fix the Lighting with Backlight Correction. Some scan utilities offer backlight correction. This can automatically improve photos that were shot with a bright light behind the subject, like someone standing in front of a window or with the sun over his or her shoulder. If your scan utility has the feature, it's well worth using for badly lit photos. Keep in mind, though, that some photos may be intentionally shot with backlighting for effect—to get a silhouette for example. So don't use the feature unless there's a reason to.

10. Scan Multiple Photos with Batch mode. Also look for a batch mode, which lets you place multiple photos on the flatbed at once and have the scan utility automatically put each one in its own file. In most cases, you can run a preview scan and adjust scan settings separately for each photo before giving the scan command.

11. Picking a Resolution Is Important. The basic rule for resolution is simple. For printers whose resolution is a multiple of 300 dots per inch (dpi) nothing over 300 pixels per inch for the photo will make any difference when you print, and even 200 ppi looks almost as good. So for anything you may print at the same size, set the scan resolution for at least 200 ppi and no higher than 300 ppi. For printers whose resolution is a multiple of 360 dpi, the equivalent scan resolutions are 360 ppi and 240 ppi. If you think you might crop the image or print it at larger size, scan it at a resolution that will give you at least 200 (or 240) ppi after it's enlarged. For a 4 by 6 that you might print at 8 by 10, for example, 8 divided by 4 is 2. So if you want 200 ppi when you print at 8 inches, you need to scan at 400 ppi. If you never expect to enlarge the image or even print it, 72 ppi is fine for viewing on screen.

12. Scanning Photos in an Album Can Be Done. If the photos you want to scan are already mounted in an album, it's best to take them out before scanning. It's hard to get book pages to lie flat on a flatbed, and it's hard to get a good scan if the photos aren't flat. If you can take individual pages out of the binder, use your scan utility's batch mode if it has one, so you can scan the whole page at once. Otherwise, it's best to take each photo out of the album, scan it, and then remount it.

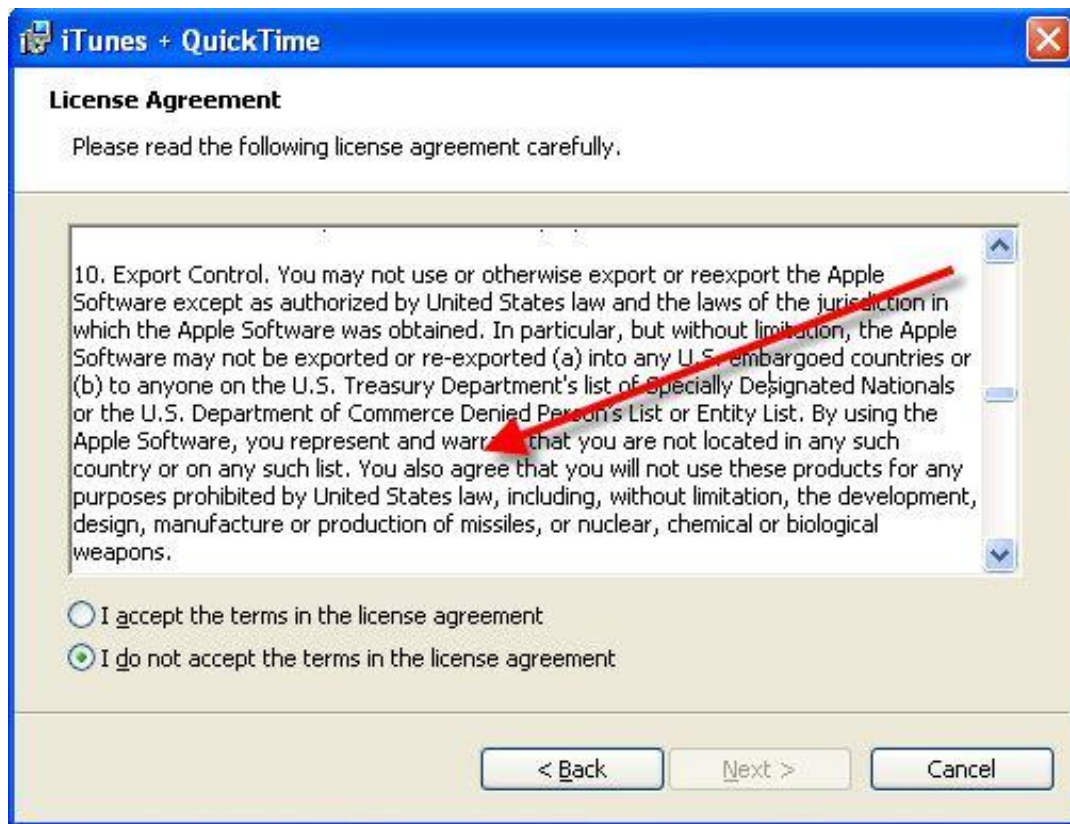
If the photos are permanently mounted, and the pages won't come out, try scanning with the scanner close to the edge of the desk or table it's on. Put one page of the album as flat as possible on the flatbed, and let the facing page and cover hang straight down along the side of the desk or table.

Hopefully these tips will help you pick a scanner and streamline the scanning process. However if you are like me and have lots of photographs be prepared to spend a lot of time on this project!

EULA (End User Licensing Agreement)

Let's be honest, no one reads EULA's (End User Licensing Agreement) – we all just scroll down to the bottom and click “I Accept”. EULAs are full of confusing legalese to make them incomprehensible to the average person – no one actually wants us reading them (you could use EULalyzer, which reads them for you). That explains how ridiculous clauses can exist in EULAs without any outcry.

I'm no lawyer, so I can't comment on the legal status of EULAs, which are different in each country. However did you know that Apple's iTunes EULA expressly forbids you



from using iTunes to create missiles and biological, chemical, or nuclear weapons! Shame on you for not seeing that!

Free Sound Effects

Next time you're watching your favorite movie, close your eyes and listen to the sound effects. Everything from footsteps to machines to ambient crowd noise is a sound effect. They were either recorded during shooting or added in post-production. You'd be surprised how integral good sound effects are to movies. You can add them to your own movies or slideshows by checking out "Audiomicro" which has thousands of free ones available for download for your personal use. They shouldn't be used in videos intended for public showing.

Details can be found [here](#).

Well that is all for this newsletter, remember I welcome contributions so if you have something for the next (September) edition don't be shy! Have a great summer!



Greetings from our menagerie!