

Fun With the Crop Tool

by

Dennis Owsley

September 16, 2007

The Crop Tool is a versatile tool that can be used to do other things than simply crop images. Although there are many other uses we will only cover four of the ones that I use most often. These are:

- Cropping images
- Resizing Images
- Straightening Horizons
- Changing Perspective (a virtual tilt-shift lens)

Some definitions:

- Options Bar: the bar in Photoshop that runs along the top of the window
- Tool Bar: A bar that is used to select various tools represented by icons. It runs vertically on the left side of the window
- The Crop Tool Icon looks like this:



When you select the crop tool, the options bar changes and there are several boxes that appear. From the left to the right these are designated: width; an arrows [\leftrightarrow] button; height and resolution. There are buttons to the right of these windows: a pull down menu that you don't need; one that says "front image" that you don't need and one that says "clear" that you do need. On the right side of the main window are small windows arranged vertically. These are (from top to bottom): the Navigation Window; the Color Window; the History Window (very important) and the Layers Window. For our operations, the History Window is the most important because when you foul up (and you will as you learn this), that always allows you to go back to a previous state.

All of these operations start by clicking the image with the crop tool icon approximately where you want to start your crop. To just crop your image, if the height and width boxes are not filled in, the tool operates like a free tool, you can set the crop to any width to height ratio visually. If values are filled in, the width to height ratio of the crop reflects these values. You can use the sizing boxes at the corners to position the "crawling ants" in the right position. Once an image is clicked by the crop tool, the options bar now changes to (left to right): a check box that says "shield;" a "color" box; an opacity box; a check box that says "perspective;" a button with the Universal Stop Symbol and a button with a big check mark (\checkmark).

To do a simple crop of an image; click the crop tool at a corner where you want to crop and pull out the crop box until the area you want to retain is inside the box. If the "shield" box is checked, the color box has some color in it (black is best) and the opacity box is about 50-100%, you will see the area of your image that will be left surrounded with a "shield" of image that will be cropped out that is darker. If you don't like the crop, click the "Stop" box and start over. If you like the crop, click the button with the big check mark. Your cropped image will retain the original resolution of the starting image. Under no circumstances should the "perspective" box be checked if you are doing a simple crop.

To crop your image to a definite size, use the "width" and "height" boxes. For example, to do a crop with a final size of 10 inches wide by 8 inches high, enter 10 in and 8 in into the "width" and "height" boxes. Pull out your crop box and when you are satisfied with it, click the check button. This will give you an 8 x 10 inch image at your original resolution, which may be fine for the web, but is not fine for printing. The arrows button switches the values in the "width" and "height" boxes. To crop to a definite size and a new resolution, enter the resolution you want in the "resolution" box. 240 or 300 dpi are good for printing. Do your crop. A caveat, if your image size after the crop is larger than the original size, go back and crop your image to the original with the resolution box empty. Then use the image size dialogue to bring your image size up to the resolution for printing. So, in one step it is possible to resize and change the resolution of your images. Thus, you can take your image for the Winter Holiday Show, enter the following in the boxes (for a horizontal image): 768 px (width); 512 px (height) and 150 resolution. Pull out your crop box and click the check button. You can also set the crop tool to crop at a maximum height or width without specifying the other dimension. To do a crop for the Holiday show, set the width at 768 px and leave the height box blank. Set the resolution at 150 and pull out your crop. If it looks right, check the check button and you're ready for prime time. Again, in these operations, do not click the "perspective" box.

To straighten a horizon in an image, select an area for cropping that includes the horizon. **Then**, click the "perspective" box. Depending on whether you want to crop off some off the bottom or off the top of your image, grab a corner of the crop box with your pointer, and drag the corner straight upward or downward until the once horizontal "crawling ants" are parallel to the horizon. Then click the check box. You will probably have to try this several times before you get the hang of it, so the "Stop" button and history window is very important to go back.

A tilt-shift lens straightens perspective of buildings and landscapes with trees that lean toward the middle when a wide-angle lens is used. **To use the Crop Tool as a virtual tilt-shift lens**, pull out your crop box and **then** check the "perspective" box. Then pull the vertical "crawling ants" line until it is approximately parallel to the angle of the corners of the buildings. Click on the check box. This operation might need more trial and error work to perfect it. You can do this operation with height, width and resolution values filled in also.