



Improve your online pictures

Input - Taking pictures

First of all you need to take pictures of your MOC. Here are some basic “rules” I follow:

- get in touch with your camera, read the instructions, get some experience while going for a Sunday walk, an evening dinner with the family, etc.
- use a digital camera instead of a phone cam
- use the highest resolution your camera can handle
- think about what is in front of the lens, no LEGO fan is interested in your furniture, wallpaper, bookshelf, computer desk, ashtray, etc.
- use a neutral background
- use daylight, somewhere outside is a good choice, direct sunlight is a challenge to deal with
- do NOT use flash lights, reflection on LEGO bricks is bad
- plan your session, take all over view pics and pics showing details
- use a tripod if your hand is shaky
- use the macro function of you camera
- take some time and take as many pics as could be stored on you flash card or microdrive

Putput - Editing Pictures

The editing phase at least takes the same time as the photography session!

- Do NEVER upload you pictures directly form the camera to the internet!
- Download all files form the camera memory to your hard disk, name the folder e.g. “LEGO raw material”. This folder will contain a 1:1 copy of each shot you’ve taken. This is important cause you never know if you destroy a pic while editing it. So have a copy!
- Create sup folders “large” and “small”. The large-folder will contain all pics in the original format, you could use this for printouts, wallpapers, pictures on T-Shirt, etc. You will work in this folder for the most of the time. The small-folder will later contain the copies of your pics which will go online.
- Get familiar with any kind of picture editing software. Could be complex Photoshop or onboard software like Microsoft Picture Manager which comes with MS Office or Irfanview, ACDSee, etc. The software could offer some basic editing tools like resize, cut outs, batch processes, turning 90° clockwise/anticlockwise, renaming of files, etc.

Go to your large-folder an start your work:

- Get the orientation right - no one will flip his head 90° right or left all the time while surfing on Brickshelf. -> Save the files!
- Sort out the crap and keep the best. Delete the crap (you will have a copy in your raw-folder). It’s useless to have 10 or more identical shots at an online gallery. Where is the difference? One shot per view angle is enough! Delete blurry, dark, bad pics!
- Rename your pics. Cameras use an internal code to name the files. I always use a “counter” in the beginning like 001-; 002-; 003- ... Use “speaking” names, these days there is no 8-digit limitation for filenames any more. Avoid blanks and spaces in the filename, use underscore if spaces are needed.
- Cut-out: If you haven’t been aware of the object and the background while taking pictures, the software offers tools to cut your pictures. Get rid of useless backgrounds, we want to see your LEGO creation!

... all this happens in you large-folder. After doing all this, copy all files form the large-folder in the small-folder.



Go to you small-folder and keep on going with your work.

The copies in this small folder will go online. So the aim is to reduce the size of the picture and the size of the file. Attention: There is a big difference between the file size and the picture size!

My 7 mega pixel camera makes pictures in the Large mode which are 3072 x 2304 pixel and have a file size approx. 3 MB. Even with a screen resolution of 1400 x 1050 pixel I can't see the full picture on my screen when it is shown with a zoom factor of 100% in any software. This size is great for huge printouts, but we want to get good pics for the internet.

There might be philosophical discussions about the right size of a picture on the internet. No one seems to surf with a screen resolution of 800 x 600 pixels anymore. I recommend a pictures size of 800 x 600 pixels for pictures which I show online. For special cases I use higher sizes, but I name them to warn a user that this files might not be display correct on a normal screen resolution (e.g. wallpapers: <http://www.brickshelf.com/cgi-bin/gallery.cgi?f=113126>)

If you have split you pictures in "overall" and "details" it will work for both if you use a 800 x 600 size for online pics.

Next step is the file size. The file size isn't necessary changed if you change the size of the picture. I could reduce my raw-pics form 3072 x 2304 without losing bytes. That is not senseful for online pics. For most LEGO online pics *.jpg is recommended and works well. You need to play with the compression of *.jpg. At least you should use compression for online pics. There is no benefit if you do not compress the file size. The quality of non compressed online pictures isn't better. That is not the fault of the picture, it is the fault of the physical hardware of everyone's screen. A screen is not a photograph!

Again we could discuss endless what a senseful file size would be. Try to keep it around 100 kB, 180 kB or 65 kB could be fine also, depending on the picture.

If all this is done, check your pictures again. Will someone be happy if he/she surfs this gallery? Ok, then make a *.zip file and upload it to Brickshelf.com, flickr.com (or to any other server).

Make sure you use speaking descriptions of folders at Brickshelf. And try to avoid keyword spamming. If you show a train moc then there is no need for a "space" keyword. Otherwise keywords are useless some day. (with unnamed pictures it will become impossible to find a picture again with the search engines).

Output - Presenting Pictures

Let's have a final look what happens when you pictures are online? Pictures could be either shown directly a the browser. The URL address is something like:

www.server.com/my-pic/001-space-moc.jpg

There is a picture filename ending at the end of the address like jpg, png, gif (PLEASE do not use bmp!). Modern browser versions have a automatic resize function. This is bad, because it does not make the user aware that the pic is probably to big for the internet. Click on the image to see the real size. Firefox offers a lens to zoom in.

Here is an example of a plain view. Attention, use a modern 28" screen to see the whole picture:

Plain view on the picture:

http://www.brickshelf.com/gallery/Rollingbricks/Homepage/Gauge1/FreightWagonG10/g10_1.jpg

This is the address if you want to show a pictures within a thread or at your own website. Use the tag or the special formatting code at lugnet to include a reference to the pic.

The resize mechanism doesn't work anymore. The picture in the thread is shown in its original size. The example above shows a much to big picture. People get angry about the size of the picture rather enjoying a great LEGO MOC.

There is a last thing you should consider. Even if you upload a 3200 x 2300 pixel pic online it could be displayed smaller when it is reference at a website. The tag could be added with some width and height



information. This gives the browser the task to use the huge picture but to display it smaller. ATTENTION: The filesize isn't changed at all, a 3 MB pic is just pressed into a smaller display "window". The pic becomes "viewable" but the traffic for download stays the same.

This method is used by Brickshelf automatically. You see this at the bottom line saying "Image resized from 2272x1704". Again, it's only the mode of display which is resized, not the size of the picture nor the file size of the picture.

Gallery at Brickshelf with resized display of a picture:
<http://www.brickshelf.com/cgi-bin/gallery.cgi?i=1996318>

Remember, the full size is this:
http://www.brickshelf.com/gallery/Rollingbricks/Homepage/Gauge1/FreightWagonG10/g10_1.jpg
(Switch off the automatic resize function of your browser!)

Brickshelf Thumbnails

Another method is used by Brickshelf to create the thumbnail pictures in the overview gallery.

Overview with thumbnails:
<http://www.brickshelf.com/cgi-bin/gallery.cgi?f=203210>

While uploading your pictures an batch process copies the pictures and makes a new size and a new filename for the thumbnail pictures.

Thumbnail:
http://www.brickshelf.com/gallery/Rollingbricks/Homepage/Gauge1/FreightWagonG10/thumb/g10_1.jpg_thumb.jpg

And again the real picture:
http://www.brickshelf.com/gallery/Rollingbricks/Homepage/Gauge1/FreightWagonG10/g10_1.jpg

Take a look at the difference in the address of both pictures. The thumbnail is not displayed in a compressed way, it is automatically edited and resized!

I hope that all makes it a bit more clearer and improves the quality of LEGO pictures online.

Excuse my English, it is not my mother's tongue. Sorry Dirk for using your gallery for demonstration!

And have fun with small and big pictures at my own Brickshelf gallery:
<http://www.brickshelf.com/cgi-bin/gallery.cgi?m=matthes>

Holger Matthes
(holger.matthes - at - gmx.de) (September 2006)