Improving your photos

Sometimes lighting conditions are less than ideal, you've had to take your photos from further away than you'd like, or you'd like to make other minor corrections to them. Most of this can be achieved with a little-known program which comes bundled with all versions of Microsoft Office 2003 and 2007. (It is not bundled with Microsoft Works – which is a different product).

Open up the folder on your computer (or memory stick) to which you previously copied your photos, ensure that you are in Thumbnail view, left-click on the photo you wish to edit, then use the keyboard shortcuts provided in the previous handout to copy and paste the image inside the same folder. A new image will appear at the end of the list, named "Copy of (the photo you selected) .jpg". Edit THIS copy of the image so that if anything goes wrong – you can delete it and start again from the beginning rather than having ruined the sole copy of that photo!

Right click on the "Copy of" file, left click on "Open with…", then Microsoft Office Picture Manager to open the photo in the editing program.

Note: Although you can edit photos which are still on the camera – it is generally considered unwise to do so as it will take longer, and you do not end up with a copy to return to if something goes wrong.

From here, most of what you'll want to do will be accessed through clicking on the Edit Pictures… button near the top of the screen. Before you try tweaking things manually – you may also wish to try using the Auto Correct button next to it, which will attempt to adjust the brightness and contrast of the image to make it sharper and clearer. If it 'corrects' the image in a way you don't like – you can use the keyboard shortcut Ctrl+Z to undo, and this is also the case with any adjustment you make manually after you have applied it.

The "Edit Pictures" menu

Auto Correct

This will try to improve your photo automatically. It will usually ask you to click on a part of the image which is supposed to be white to help it to judge the best level at which to make the adjustments.

Brightness and Contrast

You can tweak these to make a gloomy day look like the middle of summer, or gloomier still and akin to twilight. You can often make your photograph appear sharper and more vivid with this control, which is particularly useful for things such as selling items on eBay.

Color

With this control you can tint your photograph, or remove colour from it all together. It is rare to find a use for this, other than when you're experimenting for artistic purposes.

Crop

Use this to 'trim' your photo if you'd like something to feature more prominently in the image, or if Bear in mind that this will make the dimensions of your photo smaller.

Also – to ensure that you keep a 4:3 ratio on dimensions for printing purposes – set the "Aspect ratio" option to 3 x 4. If you want to crop a tall image – don't forget to switch the next option from Landscape to Portrait.

Rotate and Flip

Exactly as it says on the tin. If your photo is the wrong way up, or you'd like to 'mirror' it – use this.

Red Eye Removal

Not the most reliable control – but always worth a go if you've got some severe red-eye to correct. It will get you to click on the red-eye, and attempt to detect and auto-correct it. Sometimes this needs a good couple of goes to work, and in the case of lesser red-eye, sometimes it won't work at all. Be prepared for the possibility that you'll see very little change.

Resize

Again – exactly what it says on the tin. Don't forget to save a copy of the original image as once you've made it smaller – you can't make it bigger again without it going blocky! You can use the drop-down menu to resize to some commonly used sizes. 800x600 is usually the best for email (smaller image size, but big enough to enjoy) and 640x480 is usually ample for things like eBay.

Compress Pictures

Avoid this. It's an 'easy way' to make your photos take up less room on your hard drive/email/etc. but you lose image quality and risk "fairy-dust" appearing around people and items in your photos, or other detail becoming blocky and/or blurred.