



From Concept to Publication

Part 3: Finishing Up and Putting It All Together

article and photos by M.R. Snell

Over the last two months, we've looked at improving our photographic abilities, specifically in relation to an instructional article or documenting a project. Unlike the clinical in-process photos that were taken during the build, now it's time to unleash your artistic side while taking the lead photo for the article. This should show the completed subject in a natural setting. We will now be leaving the controlled environment of our mini-studio and moving to the layout (or a diorama), which presents us with several variables.

- **Setting:** While we all tend to view our layouts as flawless, a camera will pick out any deficiencies we may naturally overlook. While composing a photo on the layout, we must be hyper-critical of the surroundings.

Right: Lighting a layout scene generally involves multiple lights, which should all be placed facing the scene at similar angles and heights.



Above: While this appears to be a good photo, close examination reveals a crack in the backdrop, visible above the silver oil tank.



Above: One problem encountered while photographing a layout is scenery items placed close to the backdrop that can leave shadows, thus ruining a photo.

Missing ground cover, peeling backdrops, spider webs, and scale figures with toy-like appearances are all things that can ruin a photo.

- **Shadows:** Much like full-size structures, our models will cast shadows when lit, and these will invariably appear where we least want them — on backdrops or on portions of the subject of the photograph itself. For this reason alone, you may find it easier to confine your photography to the foreground of a deep scene.

- **Depth of Field:** You'll remember that earlier we experimented with different apertures to obtain a long or short depth of field. In layout photography, aperture is only one half of the depth equation; the second is lighting. The camera will only see as far as light is provided for it, so we must light the entire scene, working back to front, not just focus on the subject or foreground. Conversely, we can also use depth of field to manipulate the surroundings. Take for example a photo of a locomotive in the middle of a freight yard. In composing the photo, we've opted to use a slight elevation and angle to show the end and roof creating somewhat of the "¾ view" common to railfan photography. By reducing the depth of field slightly, we can have the background "fall off," making the subject of the photo stand out among all the other cars in the yard.

Keeping these factors in mind we can now compose our photo. One element of good composition is the ability to make the photo look realistic, as if we're within the

Three below: This series of three photos shows how using multiple lights to evenly light the scene creates a better photo. In the first photo, only the foreground is lit with a single lamp. In the second photo, an additional lamp has been placed to the right to illuminate the side of the locomotives. In the last photo, a third lamp has been used to brighten the dark portion (right side) of the background.





Both Above: These two photos illustrate how depth of field can be manipulated to our advantage. The photo on the top was taken at f36 allowing a long depth of field while the photo on the bottom was taken at f16, blurring the background and making the locomotive stand out.

scene viewing the scale world. The best way to accomplish this is to avoid “helicopter shots” in which we’re looking downward at the subject. Instead, position the camera so the lens is slightly higher than the layout, then move it back, away from the layout and use the zoom to “crop in” to the scene. This will give a realistic perspective while also eliminating any clutter that surrounds the subject. It may also enable you to work any problem areas out of the photo, opening up scenes you wouldn’t be able to use otherwise.

Another element we should factor in while planning the lead photo is interest. How can we create a scene that will draw the viewer in? One way to develop an interesting scene is to add details such as vehicles or figures at work. For example, in a piece about blue signal protection, I composed the lead photo by placing a blue flag sign against a locomotive at an engine terminal. That showcased the sign and illustrated its purpose. By adding several figures, I made the scene more interesting while reinforcing its mission.

stands straight up. The same happens when viewing layout structures at certain angles, except rather than receding, they often develop a lean. Unfortunately, I’ve found no easy cure for this other than to try to adjust the angle of the photo or tighten what is within the frame to eliminate or minimize the offending structure.

With the photography complete, it’s now time to create the article text and then assemble everything

Finally, I must raise an issue that is the bane of layout photographers the world over. Officially referred to as “perspective distortion,” this is also known as leaning building syndrome, which has destroyed hundreds of the best planned photographs of both scale models and full-sized architecture. While difficult to explain, understanding perspective distortion can be easily illustrated by finding a really tall building and then looking upward. You’ll notice that the building seems to recede into a triangle or maybe even lean a little, even though you know it retains its ground footprint and

into one concise and organized package. Since an instructional article is really nothing more than a detailed description of what we’ve already photographed, following a basic system will help to make organizing and assembling the final product easier. Let’s begin by organizing all the digital photos, including any prototype reference photos. Create two folders within your photo program. Label the first folder “FINAL” and label the second “SCRAP.” Then place all the photos into the SCRAP folder. Now arrange them in the order they should appear in the article by dragging and dropping them. The photos that will be used can be renumbered using sequential numbers beginning with 1 for the lead photo.

As you’ll recall, each photo was bracketed, creating multiple exposures. When renumbering, use a system of 1 -2, 1 -1, 1, 1 +1, 1 +2, and so forth to keep all the bracketed exposures together while also providing an indication of each photo’s exposure. In the event you’ve taken differently composed photos of the same step, such as a different angle, simply include these in the same

Both Below: These photos taken at the same location illustrate the difference between a “helicopter shot” and the realistic ground-level view preferred in layout photography.



Above: Remember the photo with the crack in the backdrop? By moving the camera back from the layout then zooming in, I was able to tighten the frame to eliminate the problematic backdrop and create a good photo.



Above: Well-detailed scale figures can be used to enhance a photo’s interest. Simply place a small dab of sticky wax onto the bottom of the shoes to temporarily hold them in place, and then remove them after the photo has been taken.

format labeling them as “ALTERNATE” with the corresponding photo and bracket numbers.

Now we can begin building the article using a word processing program such as MS Word or a MAC equivalent. One tip while assembling an article is to make the final product as “ready to run” as possible. Most hobby publications have a small staff, so a submission that does not require excessive attention often stands a greater chance of being used. While we won’t have access to the commercial software used for publication, one method for creating a ready-to-run format is to lay out our document to resemble the final article, making it easier for the editorial staff to read while insuring that our ideas are conveyed clearly.

Let’s begin by opening a blank Word document, then setting the margins to ½-inch on each side, and creating a header with the title and your name on the first two lines. Next, skip a line, then insert the lead picture, adding the corresponding file number (number 1) next to it. Now move down the page, skipping several lines, and begin inserting the pictures in order adding the file number (2,3,4, and so on) next to

each, leaving several lines between each picture. After you’ve finished inserting the photos into the document, move each photo you’ve used along with its bracketed counterparts from the SCRAP folder into the FINAL folder. The SCRAP folder now holds whatever is left unused.

We have now created a basic template for the article enabling us to construct the text around the photos. You’ll recall that in addition to the publication photos, we also took shots with index cards that outlined each step. This information can now be transcribed into the document, creating a line of text to correspond with each photo in the document. From here, it’s just a matter of expanding on these brief descriptions to fully convey your ideas and describe your project from start to finish.

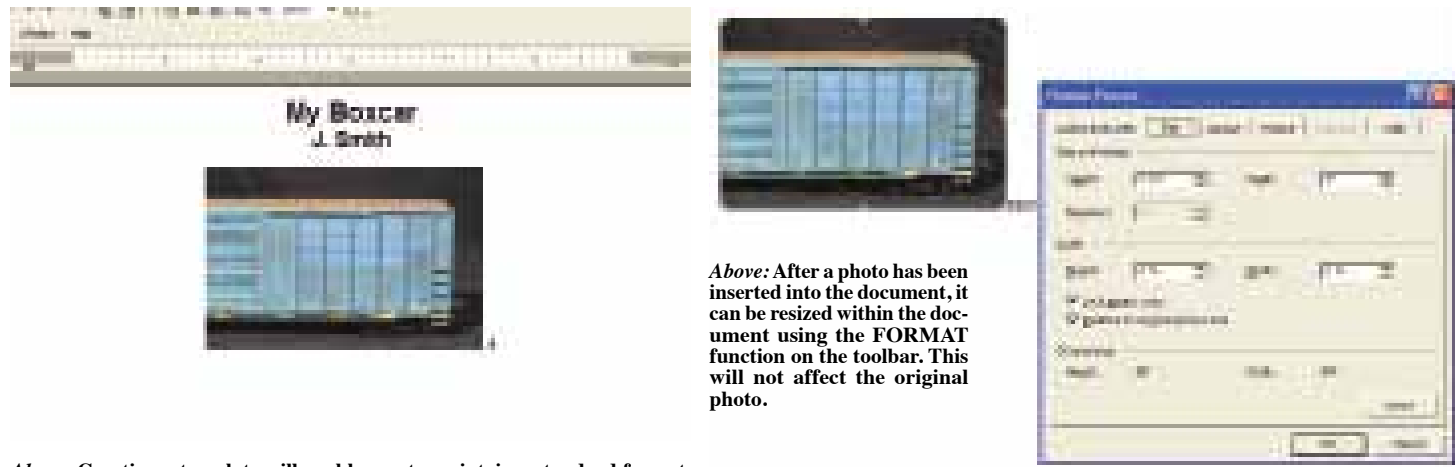
While the style of an article’s text is rather subjective, varying between both publications and writers, I can offer some basic advice to steer clear of potential problems. First, reference the corresponding photo number within the text. Although we may fully understand the subject, the person



Both Above: These two photos illustrate a blue flag in use. By adding several scale figures that appear to be having a discussion, I’ve created a scene that draws the viewer in while simultaneously reinforcing the purpose of the blue signal – worker protection.

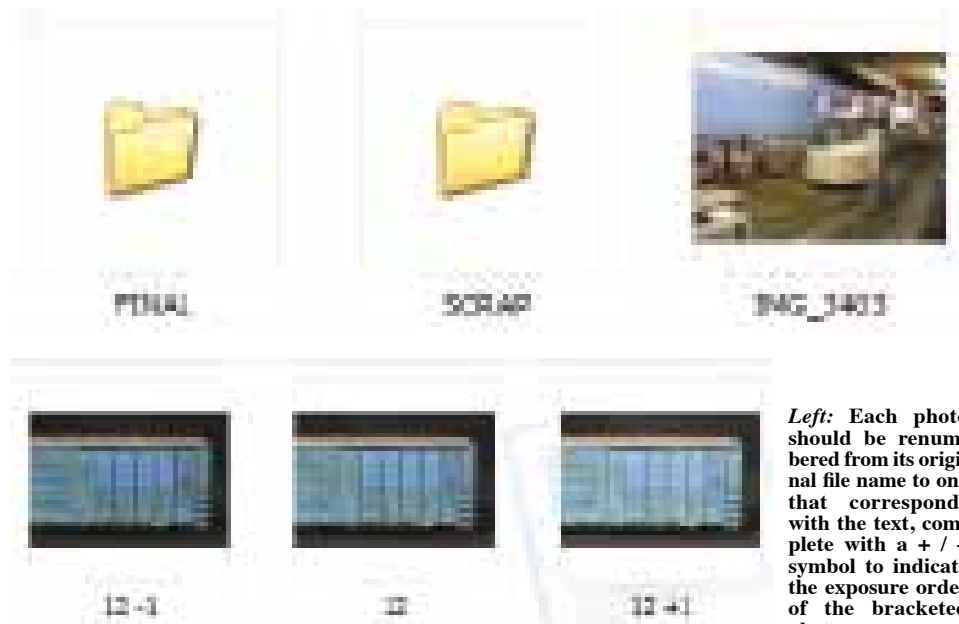
doing the paste up or editing may not even be a model railroader (fortunately, this is not the case for the *NMRA MAGAZINE*). Including a reference to the correct picture such as FIG 2 will go a long way to insuring that everything is conveyed the way you intended. Second, do not represent yourself as an expert. Few of us are, and even then there’s always someone who will claim they know more. Third, steer away from minutia. Anyone who has ever attended a clinic that has droned on will attest that they quickly lost interest. Instead, ask yourself what makes this subject interesting and then try to parlay that to your audience.

Once the text is complete, we’re now left with a rather messy rough draft, so let’s clean it up. Start by resizing the pictures within the document (do not touch the originals) to three inches long by using the FORMAT function in the toolbar. You will immediately see the overall size of the document shrink while enabling you to place pictures side by side within the document if you desire. Next, it’s time for the initial



Above: After a photo has been inserted into the document, it can be resized within the document using the **FORMAT** function on the toolbar. This will not affect the original photo.

Above: Creating a template will enable you to maintain a standard format throughout the document.



Left: Each photo should be renumbered from its original file name to one that corresponds with the text, complete with a + / - symbol to indicate the exposure order of the bracketed photos.

read of the article, which should be done as objectively as possible. Does it read like a Western Union telegram? Does everything make sense? Is every step described completely? Is there redundancy? Does the text match the pictures? Should the photos have captions? If any of these are issues, then now is the time to fix them. After all, rejection of any submission starts right here, and you must be your own harshest critic. Once you've tweaked your draft, set it aside for several days — this is critical. Reread it with a fresh perspective, making any changes you feel necessary. Then read it aloud (hopefully to another modeler) to gain another perspective (it is amazing how many errors are detected this way). Repeat the revision process until you are fully satisfied.

Now that we've completed the article mock-up, it's time to package up things. Keeping with the theme of ease for the end user, save the document (using the 'SAVE AS' function) in three versions, one with

"pics inserted," one as "text only," and one as a "cover." Creating the "pics inserted" version involves nothing more than saving the completed document with a different file name. To create a "text only" version, eliminate the photos and any scans such as drawings, then move any captions to a separate area below the body of text. Be sure the captions are numbered to correspond with the photo or graphic. This will make it easier for the person doing the magazine layout because they can now simply copy and paste text. Finally, by using the third version — the "cover" — we can generate a professional-looking cover for a CD case. Simply delete everything after the lead photo, leaving only the header and the photo, then print and cut it to size.

Next, your work can be copied onto two CDs: one for submission (either by mail or electronically) and a second to keep as a backup in the event any portion of the data would need to be recreated later. On

Left: Placing all your photos into one folder and then moving them as they are used is an easy way to keep organized.

the submission CD, copy both the pictures and text versions of your article, as well as all the photos used in the article (which should be located in the FINAL folder). On your backup CD, copy everything, including the SCRAP folder, because you may find a need to reference it later, possibly even years after submitting the article.

With the CDs complete, an organized hard copy folder can now be created. Begin with a blank folder, labeling it with the title of your article and your name. Print convenience copies of the completed article with pictures inserted, and place it into the folder. This will enable the editorial staff to quickly review your work and make notes on the copy. Next, include the submission CD, insuring it is labeled with your contact information: name, street address, phone, and e-mail address. This enables the publication staff to easily contact you. Finally, include any items such as maps, timetables, drawings, or even print photos you have used or referenced into the folder, so the publication can scan them using professional equipment. (Bear in mind that each publication has different policies for the return of original documents, and you should be aware of these ahead of time. If you are not comfortable sending original documents, contact the publication for potential remedies such as scanning by a local photo store or graphics firm.)

We have now completed the journey from idea to finished article. All that's left is to submit the piece. Prior to submitting an article, give some forethought to where it would fit best. Model railroading has numerous publications, both conventional and online, and each tends to address various topics slightly differently. When writing for



the *NMRA MAGAZINE* or other NMRA publication, it is best to include something that has to do with being a member of the NMRA or an NMRA activity. For example, "I built this car as part of my effort to earn a merit award for the Achievement Program," or "My layout was on tour for xxx NMRA event," or "This relates to my

Region/Division because of xxx." An added bonus for writing articles for NMRA publications — division, region or national — is that it earns you points toward the Author Certificate. Another writing/submission tip is to survey what has been published in the last 24 to 36 months. If there have already been several pieces on modeling a

Left: Consumer-grade home scanners are often inadequate for publication work, so originals of maps, drawings, and other paper goods must often be sent to a publisher. Prior to sending these possibly irreplaceable items, it is a good idea to know the publication's return policy to insure that you will receive them back.

coal load, then the likelihood that another will be accepted is slim, at least at the present moment. Finally, check the publications guidelines for submission, and then follow them. These can generally be found on a website such as the *NMRA MAGAZINE* guidelines listed at www.nmra.org/membership/publications/srmaterial.html.

So there you have it. Whether documenting a car-building project or the progression of your layout, sharing with your friends or aspiring to see your work in print, these guidelines will assist you on your journey. Thanks to the digital revolution, the barriers that once held me back have been removed, enabling me to share with my fellow hobbyists. You too can transform your ideas into reality; all it takes is a little practice and the right format. 📷

Below: This photo illustrates perspective distortion. While the front of the structure has been aligned with the right edge of the frame, the side now appears to bend and slope from front to rear.

