

PHOTOGRAPHING SCROLLS

tips & tricks

My #1 goal when processing scroll photos is to show off your art at its best. And I do that by trying to make the photo look as much like the real thing as possible.

There are a few things you can do to help me with that.

p1

flatten out

Photograph your scroll when it's flat. Use weights on the corners, if necessary.

p2

square off

Use grid lines and other in-camera tools to help guide you.

p3

light up

Eyes and cameras are easily fooled. You need more light than you think.

p5

focus in

Modern autofocus is pretty good at its job. Make sure it has a chance.

flatten out

Taking a picture of a curled scroll distorts your art.

Often I can fix it in post, but sometimes there's little I can do—especially without having seen the thing in person, seeing with my own eyes what its size and shape is. And even when I can digitally flatten a surface, it's never going to look as good as it would have if it were flat in the first place.

So please do what you can to flatten your scroll before you photograph it.



A BETTER WAY

Instead, flatten a curling scroll with items you have on hand by weighing down the corners.

Photoshopping out those items is way easier and less invasive than compensating for a curled scroll.

Feel free to use multiple items if your substrate wants to bubble up in the middle; the goal is to minimize warping, so the text runs straight and the illuminations look accurate.

Respect your hard work.

It's absolutely worth you taking the time to set up the shot, to get a much better photo at the end.



square off



A flat piece of artwork benefits from being seen head-on.

If the photo is taken at an angle, everything is skewed. We can't always judge what it actually looks like, or what the shape of the page is. Our brains might not be able to accurately translate.

If the photo doesn't come to me with the scroll parallel to the camera lens, that means I have to adjust it in Photoshop to make it look that way. And the result is never going to look as good as it would if the photo were taken squared-up in the first place.

A BETTER WAY

Try putting the scroll flat on the table or the floor.

Most camera phones have indicators to tell you when your phone is horizontal. So let them guide you. If you turn on the grid lines on your phone's camera, that can help you as well.

Be sure you're not cutting off any corners, and please don't crop it; seeing the edges helps me judge the full shape and size of your work. (I'll crop it appropriately myself when I'm finished.)

Snap the photo when your camera is parallel and aligned with the guides, and you'll have taken an important step toward a good scroll photo.

**It doesn't have to be perfect,
but closer is always appreciated.**

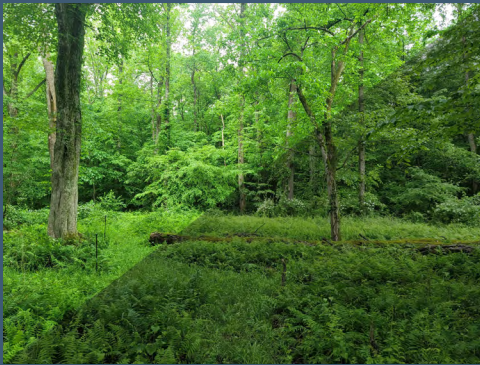


light up

Light = information.

Good scroll photos require enough light. And “enough” is often more than you think.

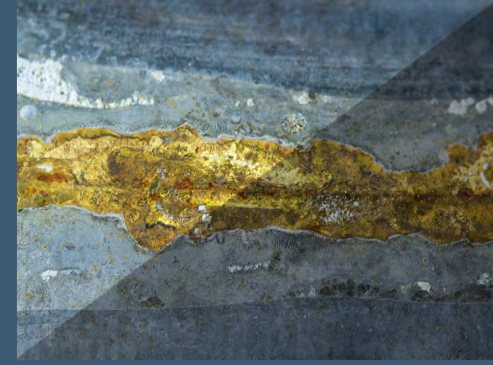
Colors shift when it's too dark.



Textures flatten when it's too dark.



Contrast distorts when it's too dark.



Your eyes compensate.

They fool your brain by using what they know about the materials and your physical environment.

Our eyes can
easily be fooled.

Remember
The Dress?



But our eyes, and the camera's mechanism, don't have all the information you have. So we might see something entirely different.

That's why, when you send me a scroll photo, I sometimes ask what color the substrate is; it's so I can use Photoshop and my experience to produce a photo that represents what the scroll actually looks like.

...Though it's only a guess. Even with you telling me, the result is more likely to be accurate if there's enough light on your art in the first place.

The less I have to guess, the better the result.

A BETTER WAY

Look at your photo against the white of your phone's UI. (Or Facebook's. Or whatever.) And let that help you judge.

pay attention to

brightness

Compare the UI to something painted white on your scroll.
Does the paint look grey?
Your photo probably needs more light.

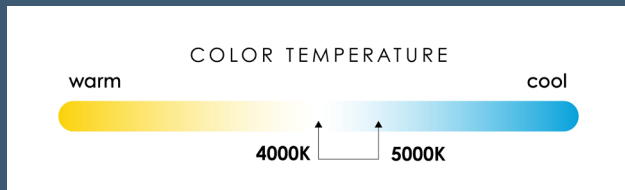
Try adding another lamp.
Or try taking it into the kitchen or bathroom,
since their lights are sometimes brighter
than in other living spaces.

Or even try photographing it just inside the door
on a bright day. The light level will likely be higher,
and the structure may help you avoid glare.



pay attention to

color



Does the white paint look too blue, green, or amber? As well as dimness, the color of your lightbulb could also be a problem.

Try using a bulb labeled "cool white" or "daylight" on the pack. Bulbs with that range of color temps (4000–5000K) are closer to natural sunlight, and therefore give better color info. to your camera.

pay attention to

quality

Be sure there are no rogue shadows falling on your work—from your arm, from a tree, from a window shade. **THEY'RE EXTREMELY HARD TO CLEAN UP.**

Try not to have the light source directly behind you. You might have to change how or where you're standing, or rotate the scroll sideways.

focus in

I can try to fix a blurry photo in post.
But it'll never look as good as it would if the photograph were clear in the first place.

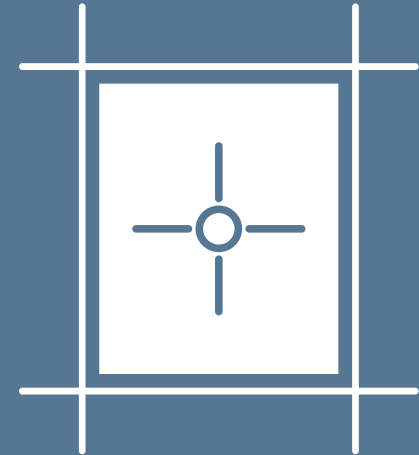
A BETTER WAY

Modern autofocus is pretty good at its job.

Make sure it has a chance by learning how your camera works. Sometimes it's as simple as touching the scroll on your screen to tell it what to focus on. And then check the result—but the clarity on small phone screens can be deceptive, so if possible, look at your final photo on a laptop or desktop monitor.

(By the way: your autofocus will be greatly helped by having enough light.)

Respect your artwork by showing it at its best.



BONUS TIPS

- Lightbulbs causing too much glare? Try diffusing the light with wax paper.
- Do two things at once by placing a white framing mat around your scroll. It holds it flat, *and* provides something white so I can more easily judge the lighting color.
- Prevent sneaky shadows bleeding through the page by placing it on a white surface. (And make sure you've removed any of your tracing sheets from underneath!)
- Shape light by bouncing it off white foam core. Especially useful to brighten dark corners and highlight gold—while still making sure the rest of the scroll is well lit.
- Temporarily take glass out of frames to reduce distracting reflections.



Thank you!
your Digital Scroll Archivist,
Bran Mydwynter