CROPPING IN PHOTOSHOP

The crop tool sounds pretty straightforward — you use the box and you cut out what you don't want, right? But the crop tools does more than just that in Photoshop. Here's a rundown.

First, the tool looks like this if you're unfamiliar with it:

When you click the crop tool, you'll see the handles around your image but you'll also see a host of stuff in the contextual bar at the top:

The crop tool allows you to do some fun things, like crop an image to a specific ratio — helpful for if you need to turn something into a square for Instagram or you need to crop a 16:9 thumbnail for a YouTube video thumbnail. It also allows you to crop an image to a specific *size*, which is helpful when you have multiple images you need to crop and resize and you've been given a spec like "I want you to crop all these product photos to exactly 1000 pixels by 750 pixels, stat."

The ratio and dimension magic is in the first half of that contextual bar:

When you click the dropdown on the far left, you'll see plenty of options, including 1:1 (square), 4:5, 16:9, etc. If sizing doesn't matter to you but the shape / ratio does, feel free to use one of these options.

If you're just cropping a photo without regard to size or ratio — like you're trying to crop out your annoying ex-friend or a stray dog in the
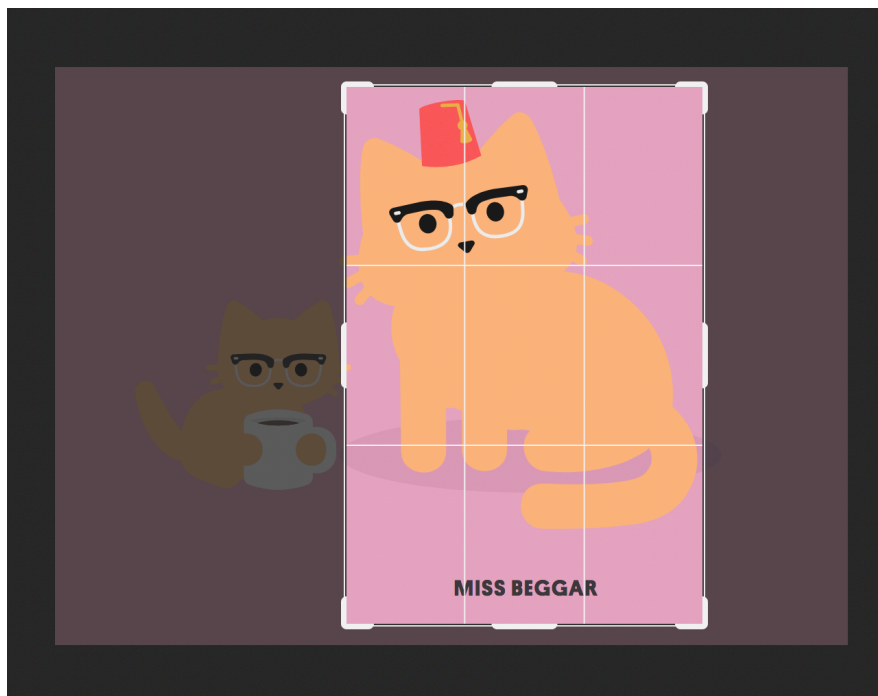
background — use "Original Ratio" and move the cropping handles as you wish.

If you're in the "I need to crop this to a specific size" scenario, select "W x H x Resolution". This stands for "width / height / resolution".

When you choose this, you'll see two blank boxes. This is where you'd put your width and height. DO NOT PUT IN JUST THE NUMBERS!!!! You **must** put a unit of measurement in, be it inches (in) or pixels (px).

The third box (where it says "150" in the sample image above) is resolution. You can use "150" if your intended destination is a website — this is "medium" resolution — or you can use "300" if your intended destination is a print object (like a poster).

Once your dimensions are set, when you move the cropping handles around, you'll notice the ratio of the box matches your specs.

In this example, I have the specs set to 400px by 600px on a photo that is originally horizontal. See how my box respects that ratio.
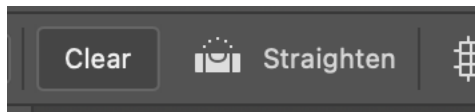
(Sorry, other kitty, you gotta go.)

When you actually double-click the box to crop the image, the image will be at the exact size you set in the box. Pretty handy because you don't have to resize it!

NOTE: Check your image carefully after you've cropped it. If the original image you started with is *smaller* than the specs you put in the width and heigh boxes, Photoshop will actually blow up your original image to match the specs you set and that could result in blurry images / pixelation. So always know what size your original was before you do anything.

STRAIGHTENING USING THE CROP TOOL

The other fun thing the crop tool can do is straighten out a crooked photo. This is especially true when you've shot a photo and the horizon line is clearly crooked.

To do this, you'll see the "Straighten" section of the crop tool (it's after the ratio boxes):

Find a photo with a crooked horizon. You'll see there are two ways to straighten said photo.

First method: Draw a line
This method works best if you have an obvious horizon you can see in the photo.

With the crop tool selected and your photo open, click the little "bubble level" icon next to the word "straighten". Once you do that, roll over your image and you'll see a little bubble level icon on your cursor.

Draw a line along the crooked "horizon". Once you're done, the photo will automatically straighten and you'll see some areas get grayed out. That's fine. Double click the image and you have a straightened photo.

Second method: Eyeball it using a grid
This method works with any photo but it does rely on you eye and your perception of "level".

With the crop tool selected, simply hover near a corner of your image until you see the curved arrow. Click and drag to rotate the image manually.

You'll see a grid overlay on your image while you're doing this to help you straighten things out.