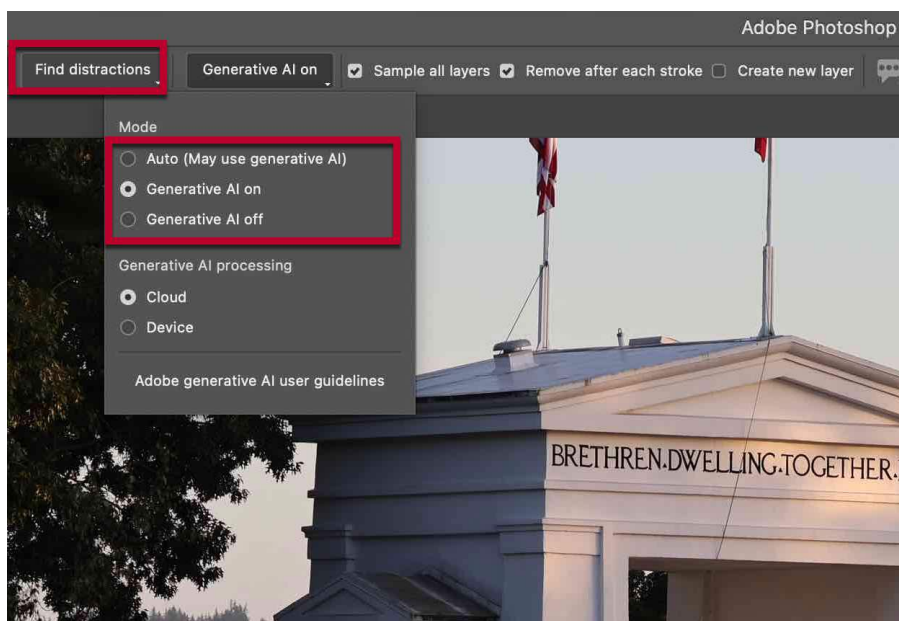


Photoshop AI Pitfalls: Protecting Your Competition Eligibility

Photoshop Version 27.9
June 25, 2026



Introduction

Using the wrong Photoshop feature can result in competition disqualification, even when AI use was unintentional. Adobe's integration of Firefly AI technology into Photoshop has made generative tools increasingly accessible, but also easier to trigger accidentally. Features that add, remove, or reconstruct image elements using synthetic pixels sourced from Adobe's cloud dataset are not permitted in CAPA competition submissions.

Adobe offers Content Credentials to document how an image was edited and whether AI tools were used. This is an **opt-in feature** and is not enabled by default. Photographers must activate it manually before editing begins.

This document identifies which Photoshop tools are safe for competition use, which are flagged, and how to configure your workflow to protect your eligibility before you submit.

CAPA Competition Guidelines

CAPA has established clear eligibility criteria regarding AI-generative technology in competition submissions. Understanding these restrictions is essential for photographers who want to ensure their work remains eligible for CAPA competitions:

Images that have been created or modified using specific AI generative techniques are not permitted for submission into our competitions. This includes:

In-painting (where AI fills in generated elements not captured by the photographer or removes and replaces elements from a photograph with AI-generated content);

Out-painting (where AI extends beyond the original boundaries of the photograph using generated elements); and

Image-to-image AI (where AI transforms an entire photograph based on text prompts or style references)

Text-to-image (where images are generated from scratch based on text entered into a prompt description)

These restrictions apply whether or not text prompts are used in the AI generation process.

All parts of the submitted image are the creator's original work, containing no elements produced or captured by others.

This document provides detailed guidance to help photographers navigate Photoshop's features safely while maintaining competition eligibility.

Safe AI Tools: The AI-assisted tools outlined below are approved for use in images submitted into our competitions. These tools utilize AI for enhancement and adjustment purposes but do not generate synthetic elements from AI cloud datasets. They maintain editing transparency that supports our authentication processes.

Flagged Tools: The tools listed below are not permitted in our competitions. These AI-generative tools add synthetic elements sourced from AI cloud datasets and/or lack sufficient editing history metadata, which compromises our ability to authenticate image integrity.

Safe vs. Flagged Tools

✅ **SAFE TOOLS** (No Content Credentials added)

- All basic adjustments (brightness, contrast, hue/saturation, cropping)
- Traditional filters and layer operations
- **Spot Healing Brush Tool** (content-aware)
- **Clone Stamp Tool**
- **Denoise**
- **Adjust Colour**
- **Sky Replacement** (replacement sky must be captured by photographer)

- **Remove Tool** (when set to "Generative AI off") (Perfect Eraser)
- **Find Distractions** (with No AI or Automatic)
- **Topaz Gigapixel** – enlarges an image focusing on preserving existing image without adding synthetic elements

✗ **FLAGGED TOOLS** (Content Credentials added)

- **Firefly AI Assistant** - can add or remove elements with synthetic pixels

An AI-powered panel within Photoshop that allows photographers to describe edits in plain language, which Firefly then executes automatically. Because it uses the same generative engine as Generative Fill and Generative Expand, any content changes it makes will contain synthetic pixels and will be flagged in the image's C2PA manifest. Photographers may not realize a suggested edit has triggered AI generation.

Avoid using the Firefly AI Assistant for any image intended for competition submission.

- **Harmonize** - A Photoshop AI feature that automatically adjusts the colour, tone, and lighting of a composited element to match the surrounding scene. Despite appearing to be a simple adjustment tool, Harmonize applies AI-modelled pixel calculations that alter image elements beyond the photographer's original capture.

Avoid using Harmonize on any image intended for competition submission.

- **Generate Similar** - A Photoshop AI feature that analyzes a selected element(s) within an image or an image and generates visually similar variations. These variations are created using synthetic pixels sourced from Adobe's Firefly cloud dataset and are not based on anything captured by the photographer. Despite appearing to be a cloning tool, Generate Similar creates entirely new AI-generated content that will be flagged in the image's C2PA manifest.

Avoid using Generate Similar on any image intended for competition submission.

- **Generative Background** (synthetic sky added)

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Figure 1 – Screen capture of Remove background highlighted.



Figure 2 – Generative background highlighted.

- **Generative Image** – text-to-image create (firefly.adobe.com)

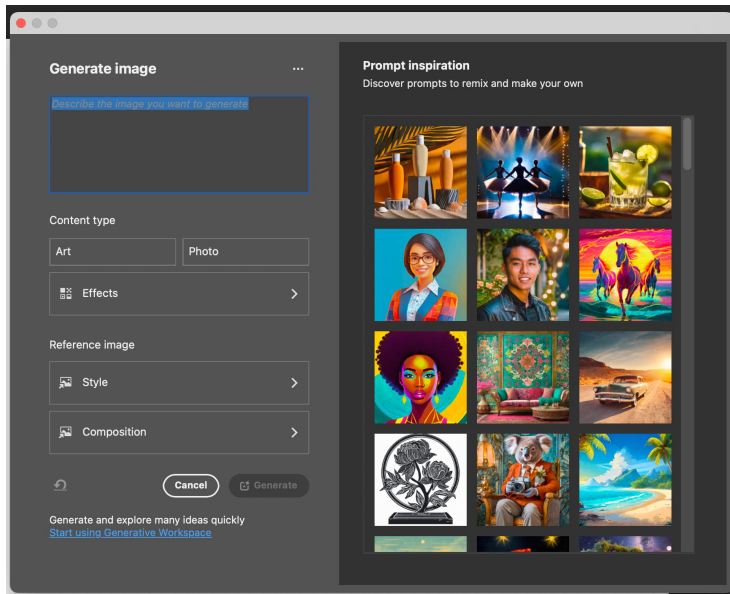


Figure 3 – Screen capture of the Adobe' Generate Image feature within Photoshop

- **Generative Expand** - expands the borders with the Crop tool

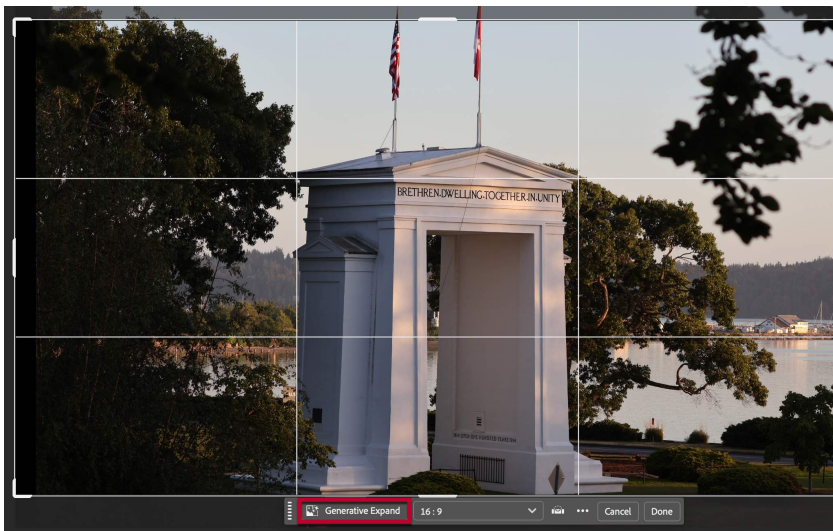


Figure 4 - Screen capture of the Generative Expand feature

- **Generative Upscale** - feature performs cloud-based AI processing that adds synthetic elements to the image to enhance and upscale it beyond just resizing the original pixels

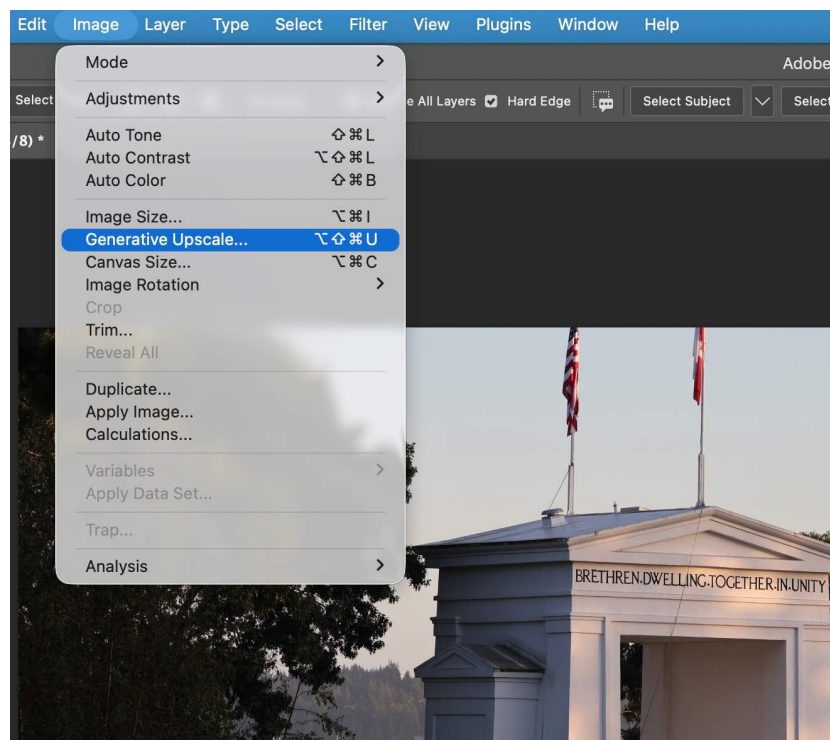


Figure 5- Screen capture of the Generative Upscale feature within Photoshop

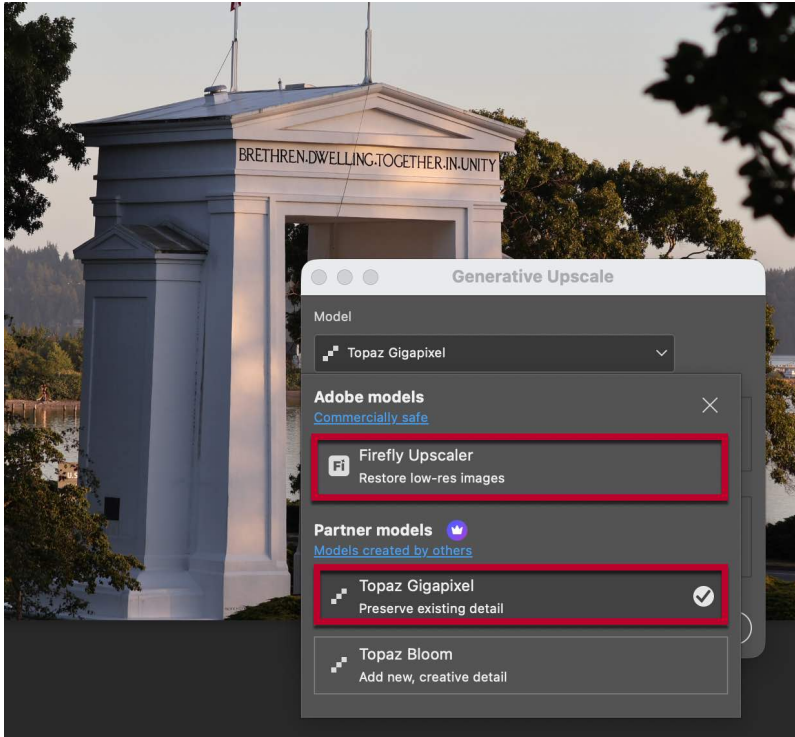


Figure 6 – Generative Upscale feature within Photoshop.

- **Generative Fill** – add or remove content in an image via text prompt. Three options are available (Firefly – Nano Banana – Flux Kontext)

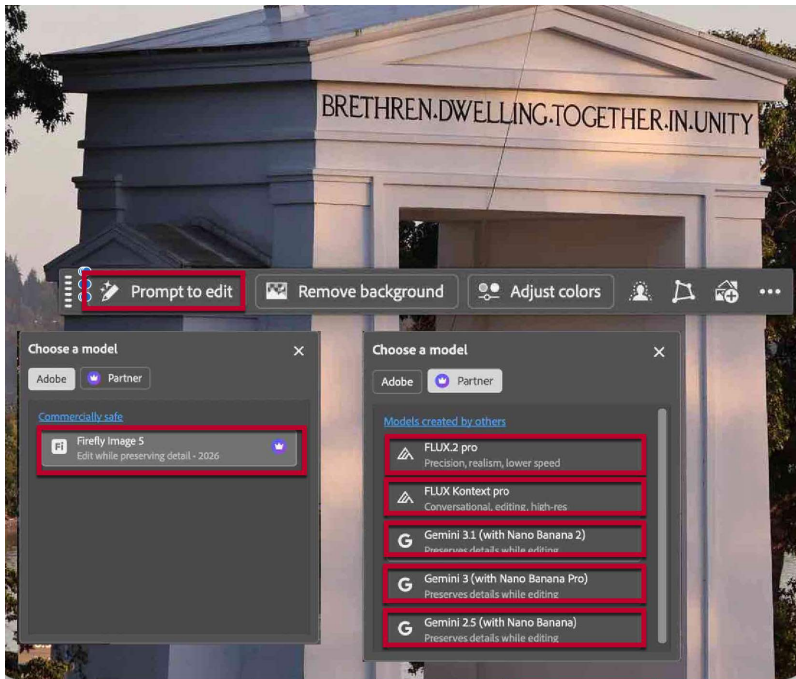


Figure 7 – Screen capture of the Generative Fill & Remove features

• Remove Tool

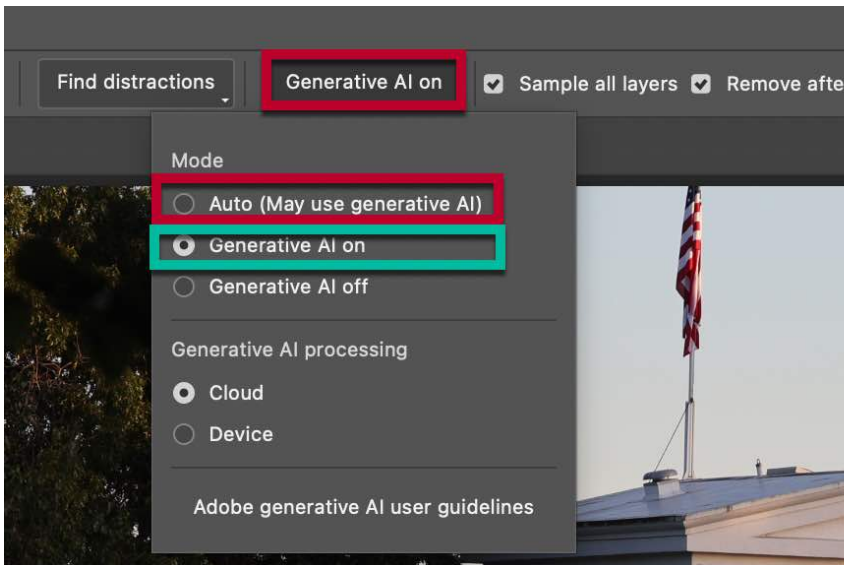


Figure 8 - Screen capture of Photoshop's Remove option dropdown selection.

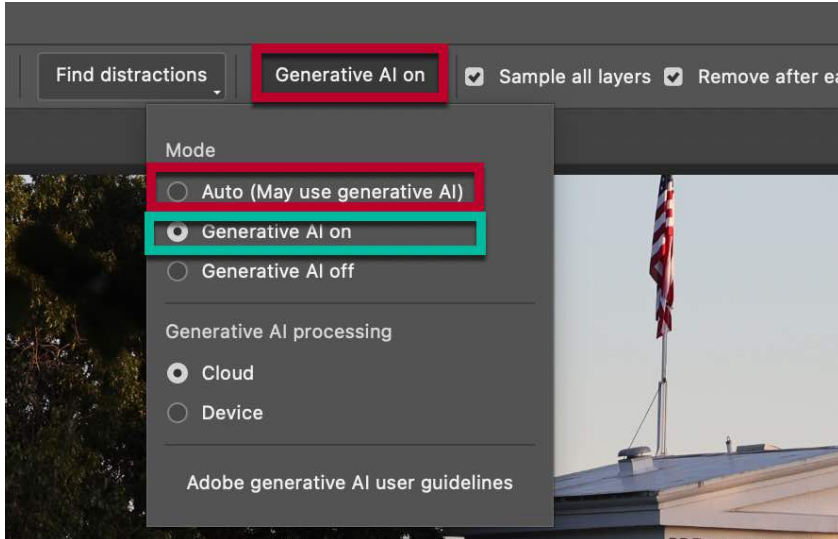


Figure 9 – Screen capture of the Distractions and the different Remove mode

DISTRACTION REMOVAL TOOL MODES

Mode	Metadata Result	Pixel Result	Use When
"Generative AI off" with Distraction WIRE AND	✓ Non-AI C2PA manifest injected (declares traditional edit)	✓ Original pixels preserved	Want to remove distractions without AI involvement
"Auto" selected with Distraction	⚠ May inject AI modification declaration	⚠ May contain synthetic pixels	Adobe decides (risky — avoid for competition submissions)
"Use Generative AI" selected with Distraction	✗ Always injects AI modification declaration	✗ Always contains synthetic pixels	Want AI removal — DISQUALIFIES under CAPA AI Standards
"Generative AI off" with Distraction	✓ No credentials written	✓ Original pixels preserved	Want to remove distractions without AI involvement
"Auto" selected with Distraction PEOPLE	⚠ May inject AI modification declaration	⚠ May contain synthetic pixels	Adobe decides (risky — avoid for competition submissions)
"Use Generative AI" selected with Distraction CABLES	✗ Always injects AI modification declaration	✗ Always contains synthetic pixels	Want AI removal — DISQUALIFIES under CAPA AI Standards

Key: ✓ Compliant with CAPA AI Standards ⚠ Uncertain — forensic review required ✗ Non-compliant — image contains synthetic pixels and AI-generated metadata

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Content Credentials Benefits

Why Content Credentials Matter

Before reviewing which tools are safe or flagged, it is important to understand why Content Credentials are valuable — both for your protection as a photographer and for the integrity of CAPA competitions.

Enhanced Attribution and Recognition

Content Credentials embed secure metadata identifying who created the image and how it was edited. This metadata acts as a digital fingerprint, giving photographers verifiable credit as their work is shared online.

Protection Against Image Theft

Because credentials remain attached to images, tracing and verifying original creators becomes easier. Content Credentials serve as proof of content provenance, offering protection against image theft and unauthorized commercial use.

Privacy Protection

Content Credentials focus on verified creator identity and a general editing overview — without exposing sensitive personal metadata such as exact camera settings, timestamps, or GPS coordinates. Photographers retain privacy around personal shooting information while still benefiting from protected attribution.

Competition Verification Benefits

Content Credentials provide our competition team with an objective technical method to verify AI involvement. They enable transparent detection of AI generative techniques such as in-painting and out-painting, and help maintain fair play and trust in judging outcomes.

Content Credentials Setup

Content Credentials allow photographers to embed verifiable metadata directly into their images. This feature can be activated within Photoshop and customized to include specific information with each exported file.

Version Compatibility Requirements

Supported Versions (2022 and later): When working with supported versions of Photoshop and Lightroom, photographers must use Adobe's Content Credentials feature. Simply activate this feature before you begin editing and select it when saving your work. This automatically preserves complete image metadata including the activation of all AI-generative features.

Legacy Versions (prior to 2022): If photographers are using older versions that don't include Content Credentials, they can continue to preserve important metadata using this method:

- **Photoshop:** Choose "**Save As**" or "**Export**" to maintain full metadata

All metadata includes the application and version used for editing. Adobe introduced AI-generative features in May 2023, making metadata tracking increasingly important for competition compliance.

Setup Instructions

It is essential that the following setup be undertaken prior to the commencement of the editing of an image.

Step #1: Open any image in Photoshop and navigate to **Window > Content Credentials (Beta)** to access the Content Credentials panel.

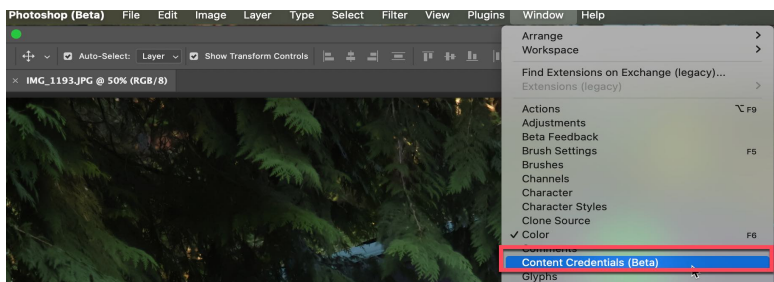


Figure 10 - Screen capture of the Windows dropdown down menu with the Content Credentials option highlighted in red

Step #2: Click **Enable Content Credentials** in the panel, or alternatively, right-click on the document tab and select "**Enable Content Credentials.**"

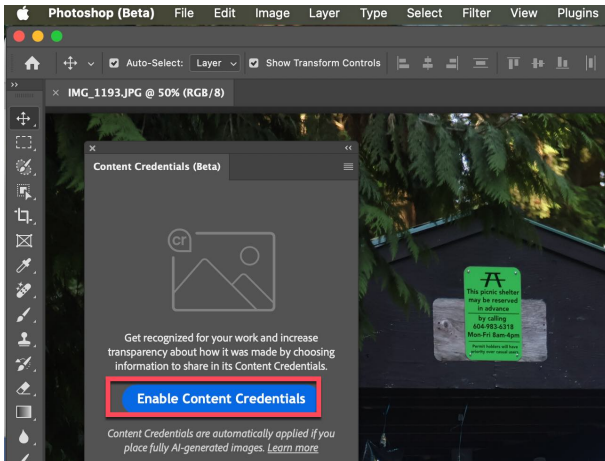


Figure 11 - Screen capture of the Enable Content Credentials window with the activation button highlighted in red.

By making this selection the following window will be presented to you.

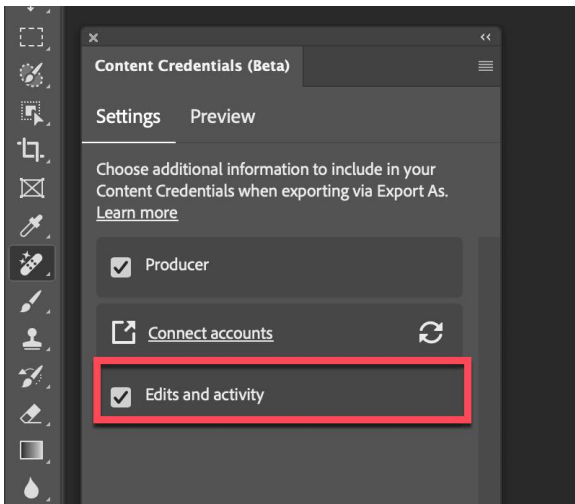


Figure 12 – Screen capture of the Content Credential Settings window

Step #3: Click the **Edits and activity** option as shown in figure 12 above

Step #4: Select the **Preview** option highlighted in figure 12 above and it will present the following window in figure 13 below which outlines that will be included in an Exported Content Credential selected image.

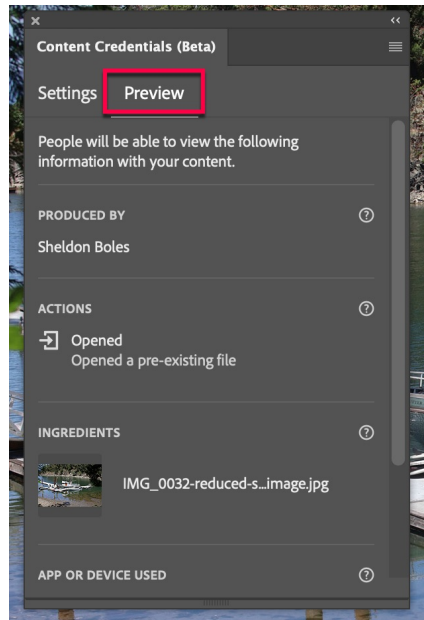


Figure 13 – Screen capture of the Content Credential Preview window.

Step #5: Enable Content Credentials for all future projects, go to **Settings > History & Content Credentials > Content Credentials Document Settings** and choose the option for **new and saved documents**.

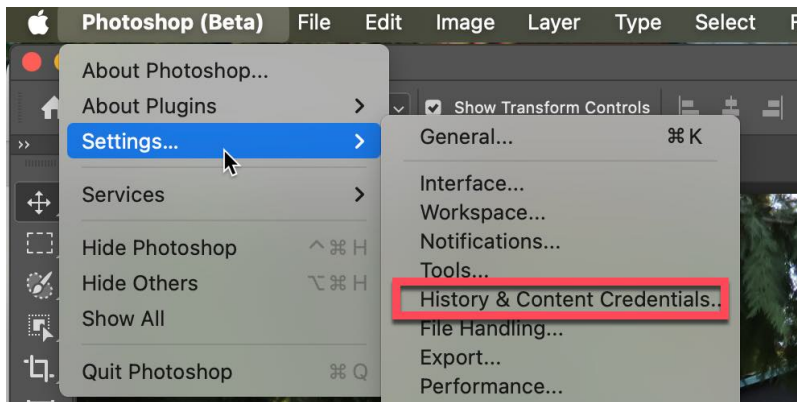


Figure 14 - Screen capture of the Settings option with the History & Content Credentials highlighted in red.

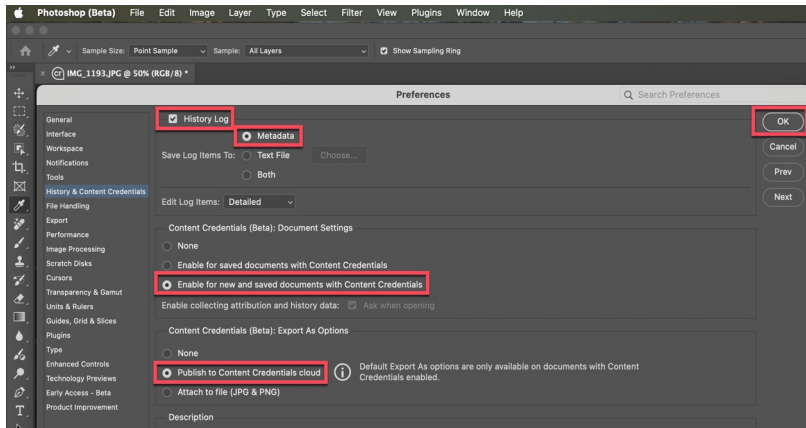


Figure 15 - Screen capture of the History & Content Credentials window

The Content Credentials panel includes all relevant tracking categories by default, including generative AI transparency features.

Step #6: Proceed with the editing of the image

When the **CR** symbol is shown in the upper left hand corner of the edit window, it is an indication that the Content Credentials is active (shown in screen capture below).

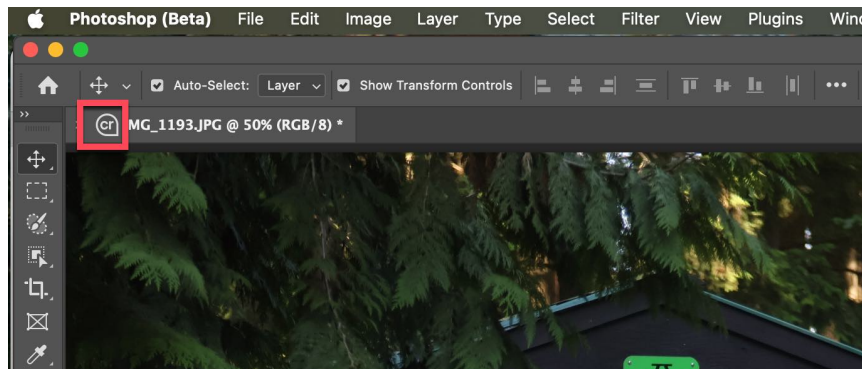


Figure 16 - Screen capture of the "CR" flag indicates the Content Credential feature are activated.

Special Note

Content Credentials must be enabled **before** you begin editing to ensure complete documentation of all AI tool interactions. Enabling them after editing has commenced will not retroactively capture AI activity that occurred earlier in your session.

When exporting your final image, confirm that the CR symbol is visible in the upper left corner of your edit window before proceeding. If Content Credentials are not active at the time of export, the resulting file will contain no C2PA manifest data — leaving your image

without verifiable editing history and potentially subject to forensic review during the authentication process.

If you are uncertain whether your exported image contains valid Content Credentials, upload it to **Adobe's Content Credentials verification page** (<https://contentcredentials.org/verify>) before submitting it to any CAPA competition.

Best Practices Workflow

Before Editing

- **Back up your original files.** Always work on a copy, never the original. For **JPEG files**, duplicate before editing to preserve an untouched backup. RAW files don't require this as edits are stored separately as instructions and the original file always remains unmodified.
- **Enable Content Credentials before you begin.** Activating this feature mid-session may miss early AI interactions. Full documentation of AI tool usage is only guaranteed when Content Credentials are enabled from the start.
- **Check your tool settings.** Confirm the Remove tool is set to "Generative AI off" and Find Distractions is set to "No AI" before touching your image.
- **Default to traditional tools.** Spot Healing Brush, Healing Brush, Clone Stamp, and Content-Aware Fill remain your safest options for cleanup and retouching work.

During Editing

- **Stay with local processing tools.** Use tools that work on existing pixels only. If a tool requires a cloud connection or presents AI-generated options, close it and use a traditional alternative.
- **Avoid any tool that generates new content.** If you are unsure whether a tool is adding synthetic pixels, check the Safe vs. Flagged Tools list in this document before proceeding.
- **Monitor your Content Credentials status.** Confirm the CR symbol remains visible in the upper left corner of your edit window throughout your session. If it disappears, re-enable Content Credentials before continuing.
- **When in doubt, undo.** If you accidentally trigger an AI feature, use Ctrl+Z (Cmd+Z on Mac) immediately before saving. AI interactions that are undone before saving may not be captured in the final C2PA manifest.

Special Note: Accidental AI Activation

If an AI-generative feature is accidentally triggered during editing, it cannot be undone or removed from the image's editing history in Photoshop. Simply using Ctrl+Z (Cmd+Z on Mac) to undo the action is not sufficient as the AI interaction may still be recorded in the C2PA manifest even if the visual change appears reversed.

If this occurs, the only safe course of action is to close the image immediately without saving and reopen it to begin the editing session again from the point of your last clean save.

Any editing progress made after the accidental AI activation will be lost.

To minimize this risk, confirm your tool settings before each editing session as outlined in the **Before Editing section** of this document.

Exporting Your Image with Metadata & Content Credentials

Before exporting, confirm the CR symbol is visible in the upper left corner of your edit window. If Content Credentials are not active at the time of export, your final image will contain no C2PA manifest data and no verifiable editing history.

Option #1: Export As (Recommended)

Select **File > Export > Export As**

- Select **JPEG** as the file format
- Select **Copyright and Contact Info** in the Metadata field
- Select **Publish to Content Credentials Cloud**
- Select **Export**

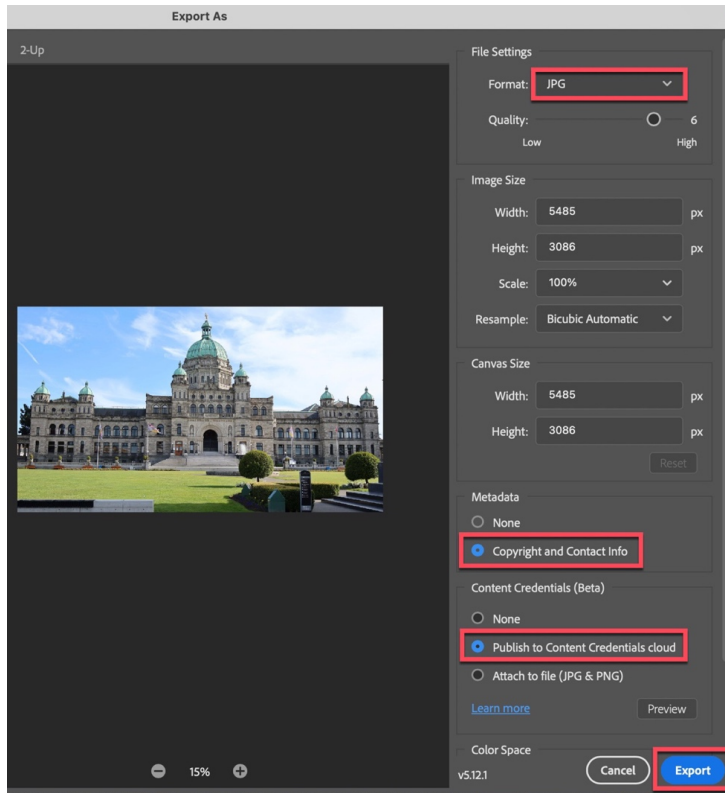


Figure 17 - Screen capture of the Photoshop's **Export** feature.

Option #2: Save for Web (Legacy)

Select **File > Export > Save for Web**

- Select **JPEG** as the file format
- Select **All** in the Metadata field
- Select **Save**

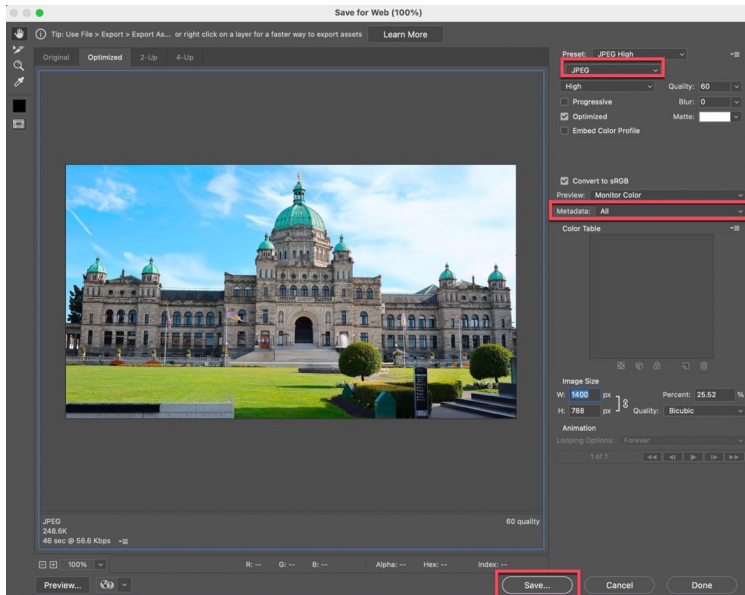


Figure 18 - Screen capture of Photoshop's Save for Web feature.

Note: **Save for Web** is a legacy feature that Adobe is phasing out. **Option #1 Export As** — is the recommended method for all competition submissions as it provides the most complete Content Credentials documentation.

Verify Your Image Metadata

Before submitting any image to a CAPA competition, upload it to Adobe's Content Credentials verification page at (<https://contentcredentials.org/verify>) to confirm whether your editing history contains any AI-generative elements. Make this a standard step in your pre-submission workflow — not a response to a problem after the fact.



Figure 19 - Screen capture of Content Credentials/verify analysis of an image containing AI-generative feature.

If your image is flagged as containing AI-generative elements, you have two options:

- Re-edit the image using only approved tools and resubmit, or
- Withdraw the image from competition entry

Do not submit an image that has been flagged. Submitting a flagged image and having it identified during the authentication process will result in disqualification and adjustment of competition results.

Image Requirements for Competition Winners

CAPA may request the following image files from the potential winners:

- Original unedited JPEG or RAW file
- All source images used in composites or blends
- Working file (PSD or DNG) showing your editing process
- XMP metadata file (when applicable)

Special Note - Keep these files accessible throughout the competition period.

Verification & Authentication Processes: All requested files will be subjected to our analysis to ensure the authenticity of the submitted image and verify compliance with competition guidelines.

Important: Images that cannot provide the required verification files or fail our authenticity analysis will be disqualified and competition results will be adjusted accordingly.

Managing Your Competition Image Files

Knowing which files to keep is only part of the process. Organizing them effectively before you begin editing is equally important. CAPA's **Protecting Your Photos for CAPA Competitions — Provenance Guide** provides practical guidance on setting up a dedicated evidence folder for each competition image, establishing a simple file retention habit that ensures you are prepared if CAPA contacts you as a potential winner.

The Provenance Guide is available on the CAPA website at:
<https://capacanada.ca/protecting-your-competition-images-provenance-guide/>

Closing Comments

By implementing Adobe Content Credentials, photographers can protect their creative work, strengthen their reputations, and establish trust in an era of digital manipulation and AI-generated imagery.

If you have any questions or concerns relating to the above details, you can email the writer at competitions@capacanada.ca