

Gross Photography Handout

Taking photos is an important part of the grossing process. These photos are used to supplement a gross description, help to demonstrate orientation, and map out sections that you took. Photos are also mandatory for all medical-legal cases, and should be taken for documentation purposes of foreign bodies, unexpected pathology, and specimens like trauma where the pathology will not be seen under the microscope. These photos can also help to aid in a diagnosis, and could end up in a Medical Journal or other educational media.

To take a photo, you will need a camera of some type. Additionally, a source of extra light is always nice. Sometimes these can be paired together. You will also need a smooth, clean background, preferably one that is white, blue, or black in color. In addition, you will need a ruler and a label to include the specimen requisition number and any other pertinent identifying material your hospital mandates. Other tools are optional but may help in providing proper presentation of the specimen, such as probes to demonstrate defects, wooden rods, strings with pins, or forceps to hold open a specimen, and clay or balled up paper towels to prop something up.

When taking a photo, you need to set your specimen up on your background, and position it nicely so that it can properly demonstrate whatever surface and/or pathology you are wanting to show. Additionally, you want to position it so that you can get all of the specimen in one frame, but with little excess blank space. Next, wipe up any blood or other substance on the background that will detract from the specimen. After this, place your ruler and your label consisting of the requisition number and other identifiers next to the specimen. It is best to not only center your specimen, but also to center your label and ruler if possible. If not possible, place them in whatever blank space is available, but do not place on your specimen. Next, zoom in on your specimen so that it fills the screen without any being cut off, and focus on your specimen. Once everything is focused, you can take your photo. Once the first photo is taken, you should zoom in specifically on the pathology of interest and take a photo of that, with or without your label and/or ruler. Be sure that if you take a picture of the outside, you also take a picture of the inside, and a third photo to demonstrate any pathology, as well as any other images that are needed. Additionally, don't forget to add other labels to the specimen if you need to orient the specimen, point out the pathology, or show how you submitted a specimen.

Since these photos could wind up being used in a court or law, or in a journal, it is always important to take as nice a photo as you possibly can. Therefore, when you take a photo, always look at the image afterwards. Decide if you need more light because your photo is too dark, less light because it appears overexposed, a change in the white balance because the coloring is off, or a change in the background color to make things pop. If an image is too shiny, try to dry it off with paper towel. If blood is getting everywhere, try washing the specimen off, then patting dry. If ink has gotten on the cut surface, try smudging it off with paper towel. If there is a glare or awkward shadow, try blocking the offending light source. Photoshop can also be used to dress up an image, but remember, a bad photo can be photoshopped into an ok image, but a good photo can be photoshopped into a great image, so always strive for the best.