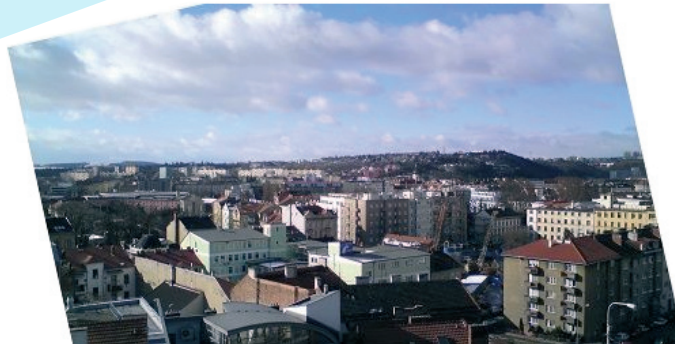


## Leveling Tilted Skies

January 25th, 2011

Intended for: [beginners](#)

There are a few basic guidelines that must be kept for a picture to be pleasant to look at. One of them is to keep a level horizon. But when you can't do that in-camera, all is not lost!



A well-aligned horizon gives the viewer a feeling of calm so that they can concentrate on the picture itself. Now, you've probably seen some pictures that had a tilted horizon, but were good anyway. However, this likely took careful work by the photographer. The tilted skies in your vacation photos probably have no artistic ambitions, and just speak of a lack of time or editing knowledge instead. Why send out that message? Then there are the extreme cases like water scenes where a bad angle practically makes it look like the water is flowing uphill.

### Nip It in the Bud

Even though I'll go on to describe horizon leveling in Zoner Photo Studio, it's really best and easiest to get the horizon straight in-camera. All it takes is a little practice and a basic sense for photography... not the eye of a master, just the sense of any amateur photographer.

Most digital compacts that enable scene composition in the viewfinder also let you show a grid. Use that grid to check and prevent tilted horizons, as well as collinearity—tall objects “leaning in” in close-ups. Use the horizontal grid lines to gauge the horizon, and the vertical ones to gauge verticals. DSLRs include even more sophisticated tools here, such as a grid on an analog viewfinder or a digital level driven by a gyroscopic sensor. With no in-camera grid, you'll have to rely on your own intuition and vision to tell what is straight and what isn't... although the viewfinder's top and bottom borders can be of some help.

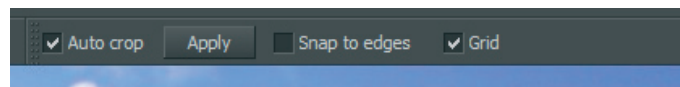


One careless press of the trigger and you can cause seasickness on land.

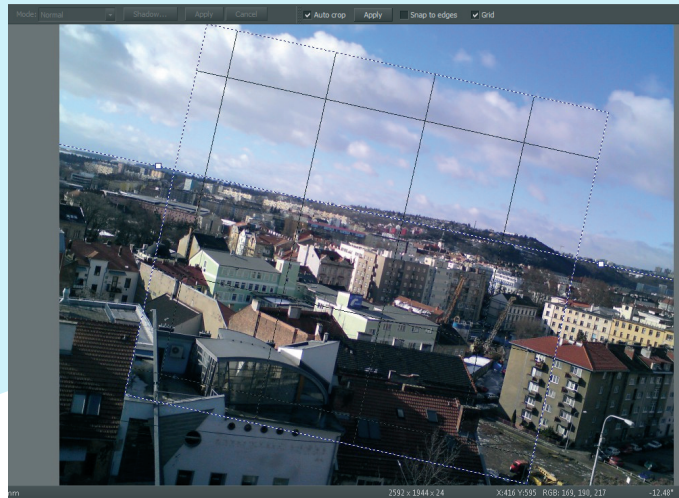
## Straightening Up

But, mistakes happen. If you do have a tilted photo to fix, start up [Zoner Photo Studio](#) and get to work. Prepare yourself for the fact that your picture will be cropped. De-tilting means rotating, and rotating requires cropping afterwards to repair white corners.

Start Zoner Photo Studio, select the tilted picture, and click the Editor button. In the main Editor toolbar—the one along the left—click **Align Horizon (H)**. A dashed line with two square “handles” then appears in the picture. As usual, the **Options** toolbar along the top changes to offer some relevant options. Meanwhile, the status bar at the bottom constantly shows the dashed line’s angle of rotation.



Now lay the dashed line along the picture’s horizon line. To move the dashed line, place the mouse cursor over the line so it changes into a four-arrow cross, then click and drag the line. Release it when it’s at the proper height, and then rotate it: click and drag one of the handles. Zoner Photo Studio 13 can display a grid during horizon leveling. Use the **Grid** option to turn it on. The grid makes it easier to correctly position the dashed horizon line and gives constant information on how the picture will be cropped after using the tool.



Try out the Grid option during horizon leveling; it can be quite useful.

### Auto-crop is Auto-on for a Reason

Setting the angle of rotation does not yet actually apply the levelling. Click **Apply** to rotate the picture so that what is on the dashed line becomes level. The **Auto-crop** option, active by default, automatically crops the picture so that empty triangles do not appear at its corners.



A lot of tilting means a lot of cropping.

With auto-crop off, the empty white corner triangles remain, but on the other hand you can go on to crop the picture with the actual Crop tool. As the illustration shows, a lot can be lost to cropping after levelling... yet another reason to get it right in-camera if you can.



Flipping the Gradient Map scale gives interesting results.