

Using Photoshop Actions in Batches

Overview

Suppose you have a Photoshop action called “Do Something” that does something useful to a file that you have open in Photoshop.

Record an action (say) “Do Something in a batch”. This opens a file, runs the “Do Something” action on the file, saves the file, and closes it.

Then, from CS’s Browser, or CS2’s Bridge, select a set of files to perform the “Do Something” action on, and run a Batch. In the Batch dialogue, identify “Do Something in a batch”. It will then run “Do Something in a batch” on each selected file in turn, and that action will in turn open the file, run “Do Something” while that file is open, then save it and close it.

The rest of this note tries to turn this gibberish into simple reality!

The “Do Something” action

There is actually no need to have separate “Do Something” and “Do Something in a batch” actions. It is just very much easier to develop, test, and change them if they are kept separate. And, of course, they can be given more useful names!

Develop and test the “Do Something” action on an open file in Photoshop. Go to the next stage below when it is working. If necessary, it can be changed later. The “Do Something in a batch” will call it by name, so if the original “Do Something” action is renamed, or deleted, and another one is recorded, the new one will be called in future.

It is always a good idea to break any complicated action into a set of simpler actions, and call them from another action. This is simply “modular programming”.

The “Do Something in a batch” action

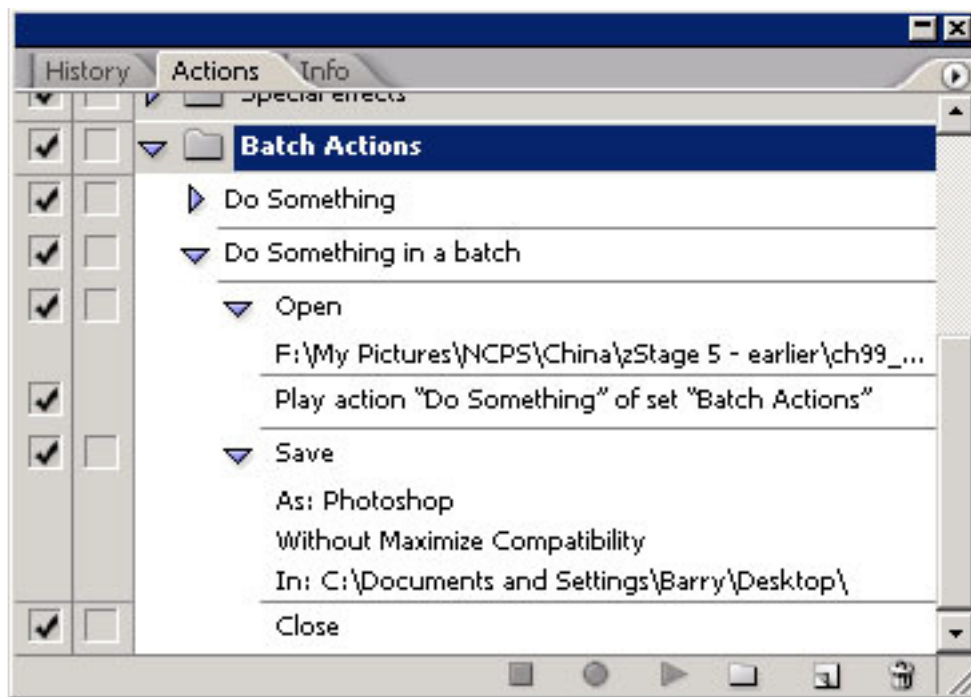
This is where things get a bit strange. Recording this action involves doing things that do not appear to be what is wanted in this action. In fact, the unwanted things will be overridden later, but it requires an act of faith that all will be sorted out!

The starting point for this stage is that a “Do Something” action already exists, and there is no file open in Photoshop. Here is the sequence:

1. Create (start recording) a new action, in an appropriate action set, (I’m using a set called “Batch Actions” here), and call it “Do Something in a batch”. (Or something more useful). Recording continues until step 6.

2. Use the Photoshop Open dialogue, (or Open Recent or similar), to open a suitable file in Photoshop.
3. Select and run the “Do Something” action on that file.
4. Use the File > Save As ... dialogue to save the file to the desktop. (It could be anywhere where it won’t harm anything, but the desktop is convenient).
5. Close the file. This is an important step, because otherwise open files will accumulate and the system will run out of resources.
6. Stop recording the “Do Something in a batch” action.
7. (At some point, delete the file from the desktop or wherever it was saved to).

At this point, if the new action is shown in full by clicking on the triangles, the “Action” pallet will look something like this:



Note that this has recorded the original file name, and also the fact that it was saved onto the desktop. Don’t panic!

Performing these actions on a batch of files.

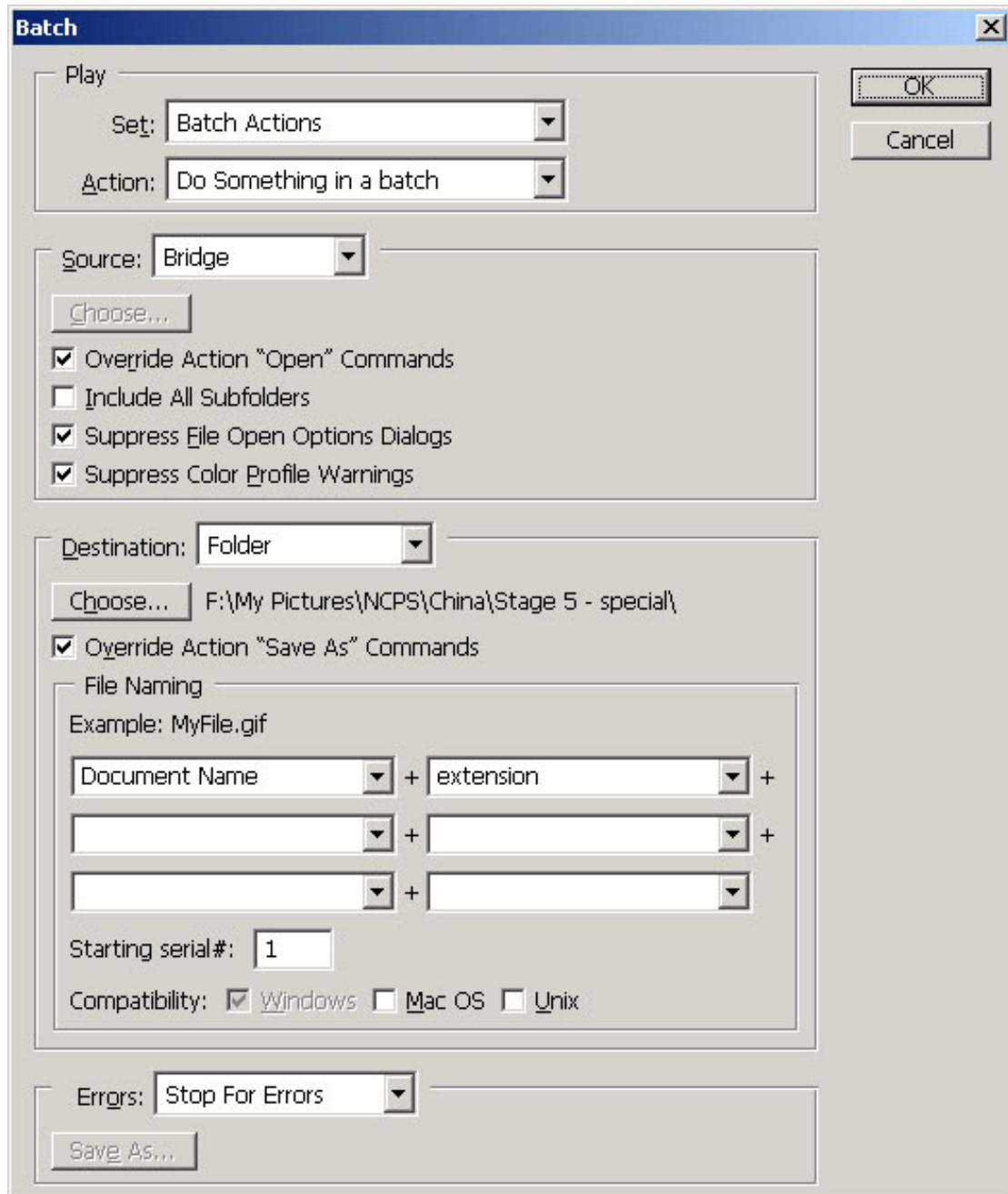
This works both with Photoshop CS’s Browser, and with Bridge in CS2.

Navigate to the folder with the files in. Select the files concerned. They may also be selected using Edit > Select All, of course. There can be any number of files – it certainly works on about 600 at a time, and it should work for lots more.

In CS2's Bridge, go to Tools > Photoshop > Batch ...

In CS's Browser, go to Automate > Batch ...

The dialogue box should look like this, after making various settings:



This must be the non-intuitive dialogue box in any Adobe product! Fortunately, it remembers the previous settings, so mostly all that is needed is to change the **Set**, **Action**, and **Choose...** fields. Here is what it all means:

Set: This is the name of the set of action containing the "Do Something in a batch" action. See action pallet earlier.

Action: Obvious, I hope!

Source: “Bridge” simply means that you have selected the files in Bridge. (In Photoshop CS’s Browser, this should say “File Browser”).

Override Action “Open” Commands: This overrides the name of the filename that got recorded in the action with each selected file in turn.

Include All Subfolders: This is actually for use when, instead of selecting files in Bridge or Browser, the **Source** is a folder-full of files. I suggest practising with selecting files in Bridge or Browser, because it is useful to be able to choose just a few files to test the actions with.

Suppress File Open Options Dialogs: You don’t want any dialogues, because the batch needs to run without human intervention.

Suppress Color Profile Warnings: Ditto. But other things are needed as well, and colour profiles can cause problems. See further discussion below.

Destination: I suggest that the “Folder” option is used. Have a suitable folder to save the files into, different from the source folder, and this will ensure that the source files remain unchanged by the action.

Choose ...: Choose that folder!

Override Action “Save As” Commands: This overrides “save to desktop” or whatever was used when recording the action, and so saves the files to the chosen folder, with whatever naming rules are specified below.

File Naming: I normally just use the defaults, so that I end up with the same filenames that I started with, although possibly with different extensions, (for example if I have a PSD file and save it as a JPEG).

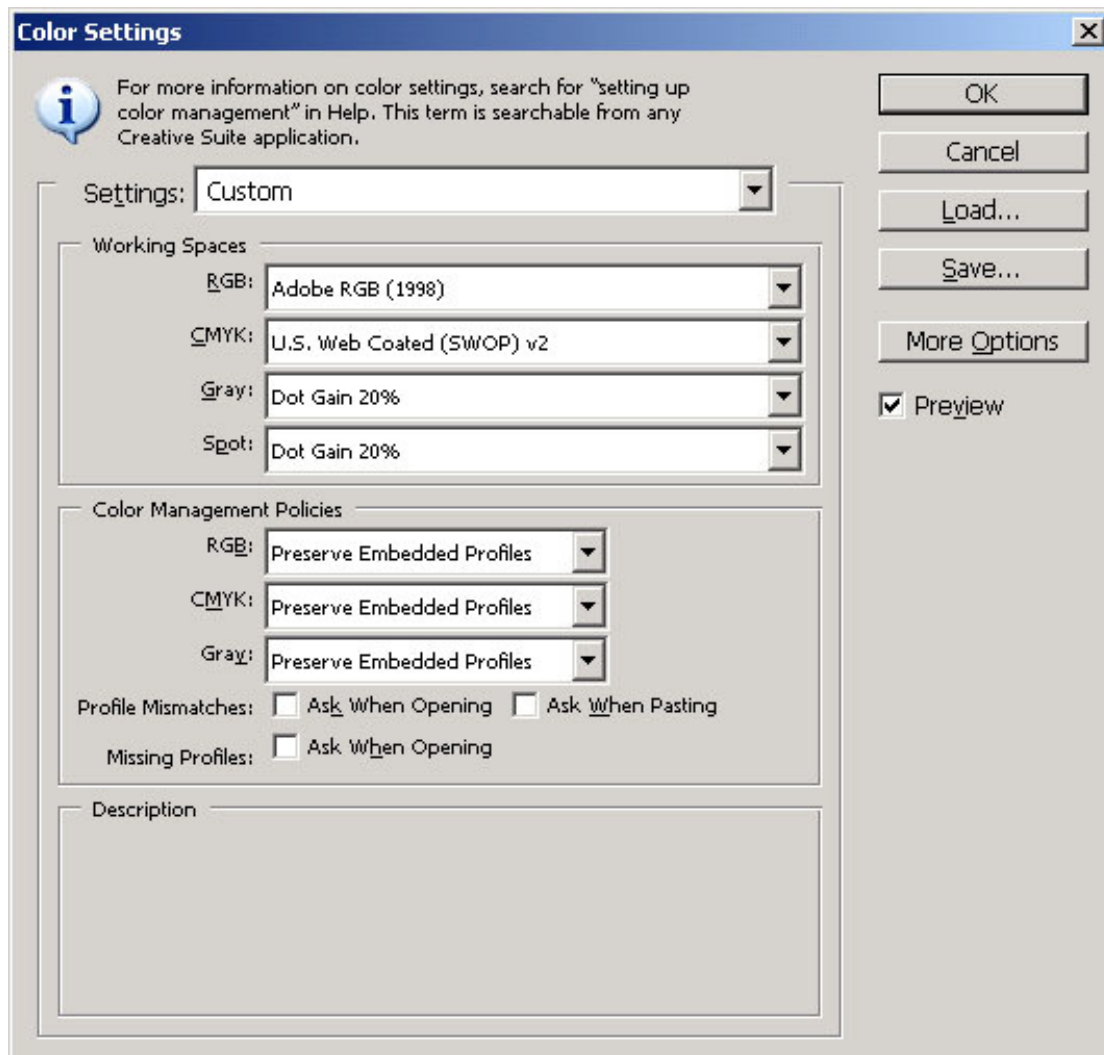
Errors: I prefer to use “Stop for Errors” to make it faster to test the actions. In practice, I haven’t needed to log errors to a file instead, but I know it is there in case I ever do.

Color Profile Problems

This issue probably caused me more trouble than any other, but I eventually made it go away.

The problem appeared to be that the above “Suppress Color Profile Warnings” setting isn’t sufficient. I still sometimes got colour profile dialogues.

So, in Edit > Color Settings in Photoshop (CS or CS2), I unset the **Profile Mismatches**, and **Missing Profiles**, boxes. See the dialogue box below:



I think that even then I had a problem! But this time it was a warning dialogue box that had an option “don’t show this dialogue again”. I set the option, and ever since then, for nearly a year, I haven’t had problems on my computer. But I did have problems the first time I used another computer with some of my actions.

Conclusion

It looked daunting the first time, but I came to the conclusion that, by using this modular approach to the actions, it was easy to develop, test, and replace them. And by performing the batch on selected files in Browser or Bridge, and saving the files to a separate folder, it was safe even if I made a mistake. I could just delete the new folder, and have another go.

Run a timing test on (say) 10 files, and this will give clues about the per file time. This will suggest whether to run a batch over a cup of tea, or over a meal, or over night!