Email tip: If you want people to look at a screen shot, you have to tell them what they're looking at

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Some time ago, Ry Jones decided to take something that I wrote and condense it to make it funnier:

> Don't embed pictures. … This isn't Highlights magazine.

Those ellipses are deceptive, because they hide a change of topic! As a result, the two unrelated sentences appeared to be connected to each other.

The comment about *Highlights* magazine was not a response to "Don't embed pictures." It was a response to a different part of that message. Here's the complete message, or an approximation thereof:

> Don't embed pictures. Send a link to your pictures. And when you ask us to look at the pictures which demonstrate the change in in behavior you're talking about, you have to tell us what change we're looking for. This isn't Highlights magazine.

In the original message, the person included two screen shots. The question was something along the lines of, "The first screen shot shows the feature behaving correctly, and the second screen shot shows it behaving incorrectly. Can somebody explain why it isn't working?"

The problem was that the two screen shots were practically identical. It wasn't obvious what the difference was between them. Now sure, to the person asking the question, the difference was as plain as the nose on your face, but to somebody who hasn't spent the last 48 hours of their life staring at this specific screen, the difference is a bit harder to pick out.

One of the regular features of the children's magazine *Highlights* is a *Can you spot the difference?* puzzle in which two nearly identical pictures are presented to the reader, who is invited to find the difference between them.

When you're sending screenshots please describe what part of the screenshot the reader should be focusing on. Or even better, circle it. Windows comes with a super-advanced bitmap editing tool to help you with that.

Sometimes, the person asking the question doesn't even include the *Before* part of the puzzle. All that is provided is the *After* picture, with the question, "Can somebody explain why this changed?"

Creating devious puzzles and <u>challenging other people to solve them</u> can be fun, but there is a time and place for puzzles. Asking somebody for help is not one of those times.

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