

DIGITAL

PHOTOGRAPHY

MADE

EASY

by Liz Donovan

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Introduction

Photography is a wonderful form of art. It lets you tell stories, share your vision, show emotion, and amaze. It's a great hobby because these days you can take high-quality photos with a DSLR, a compact camera, or even your smartphone.

A lot of people decide to take up photography and invest in expensive gear only to get disappointed because their shots look nothing like the beautiful photos in magazines, on Pinterest, and professional sites.

If you've just purchased a DSLR camera, read the user manual that comes with it. Otherwise, you risk missing a lot of your camera's features and functions - you don't want to keep using the auto mode, right? If you find the user manual too boring and you own a popular camera, you can find a book with usage tips and techniques on Amazon. But remember that all the information you need is in the manual, and it's free. Try reading it in chunks and if you're reading about specific camera features, try to practice them right away to see how they work.

Another important thing to remember is that your DSLR doesn't need film so you can take as many photos as you want. Test different settings, different modes, and different techniques and see what happens. You'll end up with lots of not-so-great photos, but that's not the reason to give up. Start with learning some basic photography skills and use them as a starting point for further improvement.

In this guide, I'll help you get started with digital photography no matter which device you decide to use. You'll learn how to take beautiful photos with your smartphone or compact camera, or with a DSLR if you have one. I'll share tips and tricks for shooting great landscapes, portraits, street scenes, and more. I will also teach you about composition, color, and the technical aspects of photography. So, let's get started!

Essential Photography Terms

First of all, let's make sure that you understand all the basic photography terms, so that words like exposure, ISO and aperture don't stress you out. Even if you like taking photos using your camera's auto mode, sooner or later it won't be enough anymore and you'll want to play with the settings to get the desired artistic effect. That's when you'll want to begin developing your technical skills.

The technical skills will help you to use the right settings for taking photos of different subjects in different conditions. These skills include knowing and using your camera's settings, choosing the correct exposure, using manual focus, setting up the appropriate white balance to get the right colors, and so on. Getting comfortable with the tech side of things will help you to take crisp and colorful photos.

Exposure

Exposure is one of the most important technical aspects of a photo. Understanding how to expose an image properly will let you capture ideal brightness, highlights, shadows, and details.

The term "exposure" refers to the amount of light that reaches your camera sensor or film. When photographers say "exposure", they are actually talking about a single shutter cycle. For example, a long exposure refers to a protracted shutter cycle used to capture enough low-intensity light. Similarly, a multiple exposure encompasses a series of brief shutter cycles that layer a series of photographs in one image.

From the technical side of things, exposure consists of three components: **aperture**, **shutter speed**, and **ISO**. Learning to control these three camera settings is vital to having a properly exposed photograph.

Aperture

The aperture setting controls how much or how little the lens is open. Aperture is measured in f-stops. The measurement starts from f/1.4, which is the maximum lens opening. This causes confusion for newbie photographers because a large number, like f/22, is actually a very small aperture where the opening in the lens is tiny. To avoid confusion, here is a handy chart for your reference:











f/1.4	f/2.8	f/5.6	f/11	f/22
Very Large Aperture	Large Aperture	Medium Aperture	Small Aperture	Very Small Aperture
				
Very Small Depth of Field	Small Depth of Field	Medium Depth of Field	Large Depth of Field	Very Large Depth of Field
Almost Nothing In Focus	Little In Focus	Some In Focus	Much In Focus	Almost All In Focus
				
Brightest	Bright	Medium	Dark	Darkest

Image via Photographylife.com

The camera lens is designed to act like the human eye. Just like the pupil, it opens when there's less light and closes when the light is bright. Understanding light conditions is key to selecting the correct aperture: if the scene is dark, you should open the lens to capture more light, and if the scene is bright, you would want to close the lens a bit to have less light pass through the sensor.



Camera lens with two different apertures

In addition to controlling the amount of light passing through the lens, aperture affects your photo's depth of field (how much of the image is in sharp focus). This should be taken into consideration when you're setting up the aperture. For now, just keep it in mind because we'll discuss focus and depth of field later.

Shutter Speed

Shutter speed is the amount of time the shutter is open to expose the imaging sensor to the light. Shutter speed is measured in fractions of a second. You may see shutter speeds of 1/4000th or 1/8th of a second. Faster shutter speed is needed when you are shooting fast-moving objects like birds in flight, insects, sports, etc.



Fast shutter speed

But sometimes you may want to keep your shutter speed low, so your sensor stays open for seconds at a time. This is when you want to take photos of silky flowing waterfalls, light trails, stars, and for low light photography. Most cameras display seconds like this: 1".



Slow shutter speed to give the waterfall a silky look

ISO

ISO is the third side of the exposure triangle. Basically, it is a measure of your camera's sensitivity to light. Do you remember old films with numbers like 100, 200, and 400 on it? Well, these were the ISO range numbers. The higher the number, the more sensitive to light the film was.

Now, in the days of digital camera sensors, ISO tells the sensor how much light to capture when the aperture and shutter speed remain the same. For example, ISO 100 will capture less light than ISO 800, which means that the image will be darker. That's why you might be tempted to use very high ISO when shooting in low light conditions. Well, don't be.

The trade-off is that when you set your ISO high, your camera has to somehow compensate for that and it does so by generating noise. Your photos become grainy and no good at all. That's why you should be very careful with bumping up the ISO and find a combination of settings that work best.



A photo taken with high ISO in low light conditions

White Balance

The white balance of your photos is a combination of color temperature and tint of your image. The color temperature affects the color warmth (from cold blue to warm yellow), and the tint affects the green and magenta tones of the photo. When white balance is configured correctly, your photos will have natural colors and a white piece of paper in your photos will look white (not bluish or yellowish).

All sources and types of light have a color. Let's look at fluorescent light bulbs for example - you can buy cool white, natural, or warm light bulbs. Just like artificial light, natural light has different hues. When you configure your white balance settings, you ask the camera to adjust itself to the lighting and neutralize any tint that comes from the light source. For example, when you're taking indoor photos where there is tungsten lighting, the light will have a very distinct orange hue. When you choose the Tungsten or Indoor preset on your camera, the camera will add a blue filter to neutralize the orange that's coming from the light source.

Most cameras have several automatic white balance presets that work pretty well. For example, there are presets for indoors, a sunny day outdoors, a cloudy day, as well as for different types of light bulbs. However, only too often these presets give incorrect results, which means that you'll need to set up white balance manually. To do that, go to your camera's white balance settings and

hold a clean sheet of white paper in front of your camera. This will help the camera to pick up the correct settings for your particular lighting conditions.

The wonderful thing about white balance is that it's very predictable and consistent. As a newbie, start using automatic white balance and see how it goes. Make sure you shoot in RAW if your camera supports it because that way you'll be able to correct white balance in post-production. But if you choose to shoot in JPG, you'll have to be 100% sure that the white balance settings are correct before you start.

Focus

In photography, focus is what we say when we refer to image sharpness. An image that's perfectly sharp is in focus, whereas a blurry image is out of focus. Focus is connected to aperture settings and depth of field. Larger f-numbers correspond with a smaller aperture, so in an image taken at f22, the part of the photo that's in focus is much larger than in an image taken at f4. Seems simple enough, right?

The difficult part about focus is trying to avoid the whole image sharp (your camera's auto-focus settings will do that for you), but to use focus settings to make your photography more artistic and meaningful. We'll cover that later on in the book. Before we do that, let's have a look at the most common mistakes newbie photographers make.

Six Common Mistakes Newbie Photographers Make

Just like most things in life, photography is a skill that can be improved. Newbies often make subtle mistakes that spoil their photos. Then, they struggle to correct these mistakes because they can't spot what's wrong. Let's go through six common mistakes beginner photographers make.

1. The Horizon Line Is Not Straight

This is the most common mistake I've seen in many photos, including my own. True, you can fix this later on using software but that will crop your image. As a result, you may lose a detail you intended to be in your shot or will have to stick to the original one with the tilted horizon. To fix this problem, always make sure your camera is not tilted. You can use references in your composition, like a wall or a tree, to make your images look straight. Also, many cameras have a grid feature - use that.



The horizon line in this snapshot is tilted

To avoid having a tilted horizon, practice the correct camera holding techniques especially if you have a DSLR, and use a tripod for landscape photography. A decent tripod doesn't cost too much, yet it's a great help for landscape photographers.

2. Junk in the Edges

Another common composition mistake beginners make is not paying attention to their edges. They concentrate on the subject and ignore the edges so much that junk gets into the shot. True, you can crop your photos in most cases, but it's best to avoid the junk there and then, when you are taking the shot. Junky edges are easy to avoid – just move a bit or use zoom.



Notice the car boot in the bottom right corner of this photo

3. Incorrect Exposure Settings

Another very common mistake is getting exposure and contrast off. Either the image is too dark, or it's too light (underexposed or overexposed).

Digital SLR cameras have powerful exposure controls. But when you use automatic configuration, your camera often tries to use one-size-fits-all settings. Because your camera doesn't know how dark or bright the scene really is, it often makes the photos too dark – underexposed. This usually happens when you are shooting darker skies, grey clouds, grey scenes in early spring and late autumn, and so on. Basically, your camera uses incorrect settings when there's a lot of grey in the photo. Similarly, it can overexpose some brighter scenes, making them appear too light and bright.

You can avoid this mistake by setting your exposure as close to perfect as possible. If that doesn't really work, try compensating exposure. Just add a

couple of plus points to underexposed photos and you'll be good to go. Similarly, add a couple of minus points to compensate for overexposure. Another way to compensate exposure is to fix your images later on in Lightroom or similar software if you shoot in RAW, but it's best to get things right in the first place.



Even though this photo was taken on a grey day, it's still way too dark

4. Wrong White Balance

While it's not too hard to fix underexposed or overexposed images using software, correcting the white balance is not that easy. That's why you should always do your best to get it right. If you notice that your automatic white balance is off and there is no way you can choose a preset, set a manual white balance using a piece of white paper. That way your photos will look natural.

5. Photo Lacks a Subject

This is perhaps the most common mistake of them all. There are countless landscapes and street photos that lack a subject. You can take as many photos of people in the street as you like, but unless there is a subject and a story behind your shot, it will be a boring snapshot. Remember that photography is art, just like painting. There can't be a painting without a subject and the same applies to all the photos you take.

6. Fear of Manual Focus

Most beginners are so used to autofocus that they completely ignore the manual focus settings every DSLR has. Many beginners are afraid to switch the focus mode to manual. But doing that opens up a whole new world of possibilities. Manual focus lets you control where your camera focuses a lot better than when it's on autopilot. So don't be afraid to experiment!



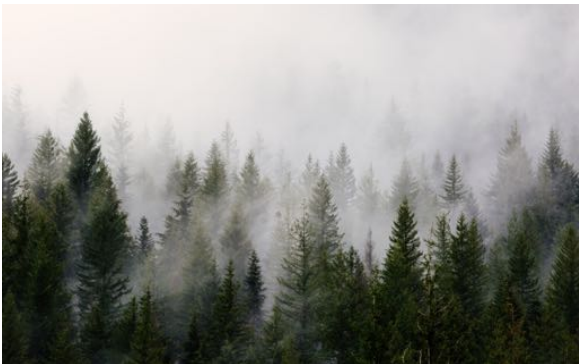
This photo is out of focus, blurry, and it also doesn't have a subject

The Elements of a Great Photo

Taking great photos is a combination of being able to see the world through a camera lens, technique, and pure luck. Every great photo is a result of several elements working together. While sometimes anyone can get lucky and take the perfect photo by chance, you should be aware of these elements and try to make them work in perfect harmony. Let's have a look at the most important elements of a photo.

Subject

The subject is the key element of any photo. If your photo lacks a subject, it doesn't matter how technically perfect it is. Without a subject, any photo is a snapshot where the viewer doesn't really get what you wanted to say. Remember all these photos from your last vacation that make you think "Huh" when you look at them? Well, these photos don't have a subject and that's why they don't mean anything to you. The scene may have been pretty at the time, but... it wasn't really that meaningful after all!



Even though the fog is pretty, this photo lacks a subject



The tree makes this photo meaningful

Composition

Even if you found a great subject for your photo, you still need to compose it well to draw the viewer's eye to the subject. Try to make the most of the scene and avoid making your subject either too small or too large (unless you're doing macro). Remember that a well-composed photo is all about balance. For beginners, using the rule of thirds is the easiest way to nail down composition.



This photo uses the rule of thirds very well

Light

No matter where and when you're taking your photos, lighting is what either makes or kills your shot. Try experimenting with different light at different times of the day. A lot of landscapes look fantastic when shot just after sunrise or when the sun is setting. Also, some landscapes such as mountains and the sea look very dramatic when it's grey and cloudy. In addition to that, don't be afraid to use flash even when you're shooting outdoors. And definitely try using different sources of light when you're taking photos indoors - you don't really need expensive lighting equipment to experiment. Also, don't forget to set your white balance correctly or at least shoot in RAW to be able to correct white balance in postproduction.

All Things Technical

And last but not least, it's the technical elements that help you to make a great photo. Great subject, composition and lighting are worth nothing if your photo is out of focus, over or underexposed, or tilted in a weird way. Your camera's manual is invaluable because it will help you to master your camera's manual

controls. When you've learned all about your camera's features and options, make sure to experiment with them all to get the best results.



Now that you know which elements make a fantastic photo, let's explore how to use them in real life situations.

How to Find Great Subjects for Photos at Your Doorstep

Have you ever browsed a photography blog and felt envious because the photos you saw were simply breathtaking? And then you thought that you could never take anything like that because you lived in the wrong place where there were no opportunities for great shots. Let me tell you that there is no wrong or right place in photography – you can take great shots right at your doorstep without having to go on expensive trips. Here are a few simple ideas that will help you to produce beautiful and creative images. You don't have to use expensive equipment or any software to heavily manipulate your photos. All you need is some natural light and your imagination.

Turn an Everyday Scene Into a Photo

This is the first thing you'll need to learn if you want to take beautiful photos. To be able to see an everyday scene as a photo, you'll need to:

- Mentally separate a scene into various elements that may look good on a photo
- Concentrate on the selected element(s) and develop your idea
- Study the scene and “preview” it as a photo in your mind
- Recognize the potential of light, color and focus
- Take your camera and try different angles to see which one works best

By doing all that you'll be able to see the beauty of everyday things and turn the mundane into something magical with just your vision and your camera.

Some Subject Ideas

Interested in landscape photography? Love street photography? Or perhaps you're a macro fan? You can find great subjects for all that close to your home.

Have a look at the photo of this dandelion. I found it literally at my doorstep. What I loved about it was the fine details I could capture. I also loved how it looked against the blue sky. I tried shooting it from different angles (and stepped into an anthill in the process), and I also made sure that the flower was in focus. It was a beautiful sunny day, so the light was perfect for my shot. I'm not saying that this shot is a masterpiece, but it's pretty and I'm happy with it.



Now let's have a look at some photos I shot with an HTC phone while making a trip to the local market.

The first one was in the city center. I love how contemporary it all looks and I think there is a beautiful harmony between the glass and concrete buildings, and the metal sculpture. The young couple makes a lovely centerpiece.

The first thing I noticed when walking there were the colors and the light. I liked how the colors complemented each other – the blue of the sky that reflected in the glass and the grey of the metal that worked well with the grey tiles. When I was planning to take the photo (and I thought it would be just architecture), this young couple entered my photo frame and sat down to examine their purchases. They completed the composition, so I waited until they were sitting comfortably and paying no attention to me, and took the photo.

As you can see, this photo was born from an everyday scene that most people wouldn't have noticed. But you as a photographer should always look for beauty in everyday things.



I took the second photo when I finally made it to the local market. I love markets for their colorfulness – each stall is different! There is a fruit and vegetable stall with bright colors, a cheese stall with different shades of yellow and bright wax, and a jam stall with all those beautiful jars filled with glowing substances – I can go on and on. But on that day I was attracted to the sausage stall. I loved the strict geometry of it and the different shades of dark red and brown. So I took my phone out and snapped the shot.



As you can see, life is full of photographic opportunities. Just keep an eye out for them!

Understanding Composition

Composition is a tricky skill to master. It's important to have an understanding of the composition theory and sometimes you just need to have the eye for balanced images. Luckily, that feeling of balanced composition can be trained and there are several techniques you can use to properly compose your photos.

Very often the way you compose your photo is a lot more important than the subject itself. Even the most interesting of subjects can look boring if the photographer doesn't use proper composition techniques. Similarly, completely ordinary subjects can stand out in a photograph if the photographer composes the scene well.

A Simple Composition Trick to Enhance Your Landscapes

The difference between snapshots and photography lies in composition (most of the time, snapshots lack it). Although proper composition is not that easy to master and takes lots of practice, there's a simple trick that will help you transform your photos and make them look a lot better. This trick works for practically any landscape and really makes it easier to compose your shot. It also works as a composition exercise.

And now the promised trick: when you are taking landscape photos, get as close to the ground as possible and use the nearest object as a foreground.



I took this landscape with my phone camera

It's as simple as that. It doesn't matter if the foreground object is a stalk of dry grass, a mushroom, sand or something else. Just make sure you're right behind the object and you are still picking up the background (DSLR users should use a wide angle lens). Shooting landscapes this way will create a sense of proportion, draw the viewer's eye to your line of view and give the viewer a sense that he is entering the picture.

The Rule of Thirds

The first and the most useful rule of composition you should learn is the rule of thirds. If you look for composition tips online, you'll see that nearly every photography blog mentions this rule because it's a fundamental part of photography. Camera manufacturers recognize it and that's why they provide a grid in your viewfinder. You can use the grid to compose your images and apply the rule of thirds.

The concept of the rule of thirds is simple - place your subject off center, roughly one-third away from the edge of the photo. If you are using the viewfinder's grid lines, that means putting the subject on one of the four cross sections of the grid in your viewfinder.



The tree in this beautiful landscape is placed according to the rule of thirds

In most cases, use one-third of the image for structuring your photo or attracting the viewer's attention, and two-thirds to show why you are photographing that particular scene.

While you can create good compositions with the subject placed in the center of the image, it's safer for beginners to use the rule of thirds or at least try to put the subject off center. You don't necessarily have to concentrate on finding the correct third to place your subject. Instead, look at the subject through a frame and check the following:

- Do you have enough space around your subject so that the image doesn't appear cluttered?
- How would the viewer's eye move through the photo and is there anything to guide the viewer's eye to the subject?
- Does the photo tell a story?

Asking yourself these questions will help you to decide how and where to place the subject in the photo and add meaning to the composition.

Leading Lines

Leading lines are a great tool that you can use to pull your viewers into your photo and guide them to the subject. Basically, a leading line is a line in your photo that leads the viewer's eye to the subject. Remember that your photo should always have a subject. Unfortunately, because leading lines are only a composition tool, they can rarely act as a subject.



The path leading to the church acts as a leading line

To compose a photograph using leading lines, you'll first need to find a strong subject. It doesn't necessarily have to be something spectacular - you can find anything that interests you. Then, look through your camera's viewfinder (or at your phone's screen) and check if there are any natural lines leading the eye towards the subject. Always keep in mind that the person viewing the photo doesn't have the context of the scene and doesn't have any emotional attachment to it. That's why guidelines in the form of natural lines pulling the eye to the subject will help you to make the photo more interesting and meaningful.

Curves

Curves are very similar to leading lines. You can find lots of curved lines in natural landscapes and use them in your composition to make it more interesting.

The wonderful thing about curves is that they let you have multiple elements in your photo, both in the foreground and the background, without making the composition look cluttered. As a result, curved lines are perfect for landscape photography.



The curved lines in this photo separate the foreground from the background

Symmetry

Symmetry is another compositional tool you can use to make your photos stand out. When you have a symmetrical subject, see how you can emphasize the symmetry in your photo. You may want to move closer or further away from the subject, play with taking photos from different angles, and even use a fisheye lens or filter.

Reflections are great to use symmetry because you can't imagine a more symmetrical subject. Symmetry works beautifully in architecture photography, as well as for some types of abstract and creative photography.



The reflection of the tree makes this photo look surreal

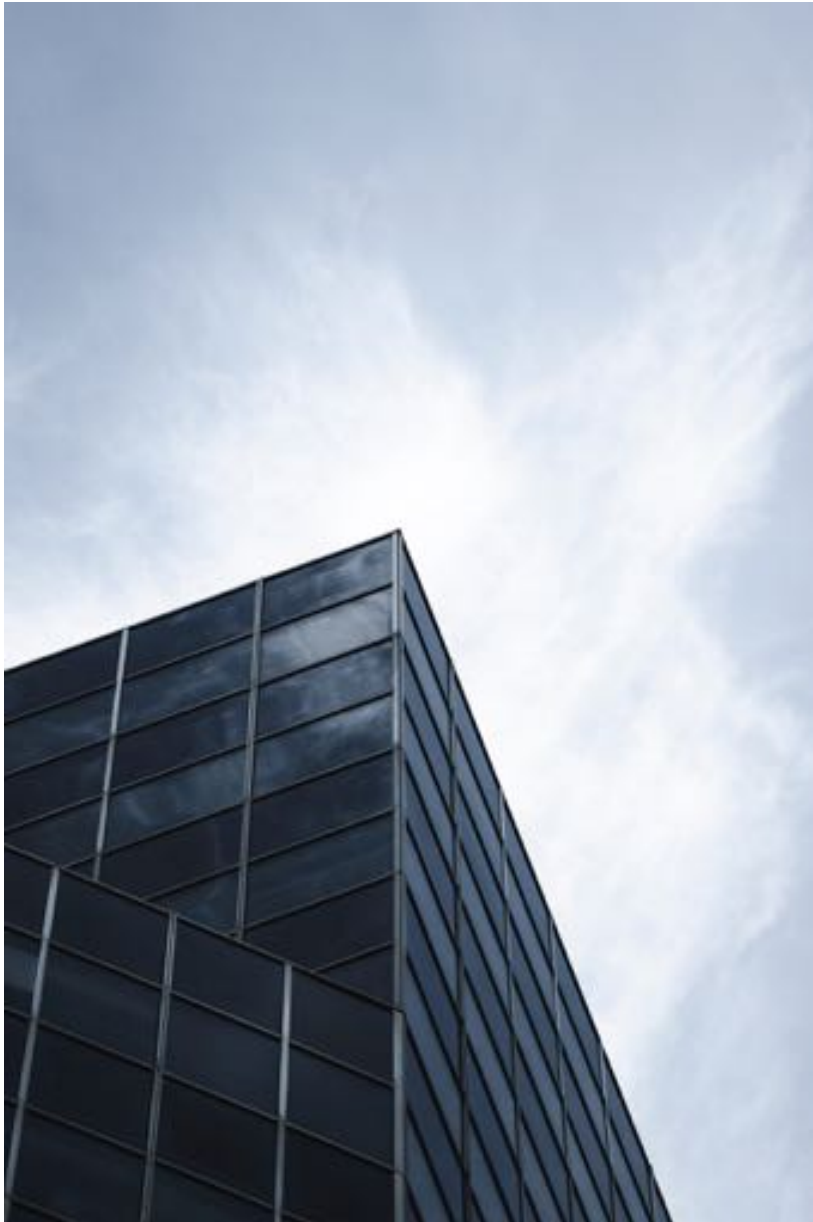
In the end, it's all about what works for a particular shot and what doesn't. Always take advantage of your camera being digital and make several versions of the same photo. This way you'll be able to select the very best shot when you're ready for postproduction and delete the rest either manually or using an app like Duplicate Photo Cleaner.

Now that we've covered some basic composition techniques and tools, let's have a look at how you can improve the composition in your photography even more.

How to Use Negative Space in Your Photography

I'm sure you've often admired minimalist photos and wondered how the photographer made them look so cool. Most of the time the secret is the proper use of negative space.

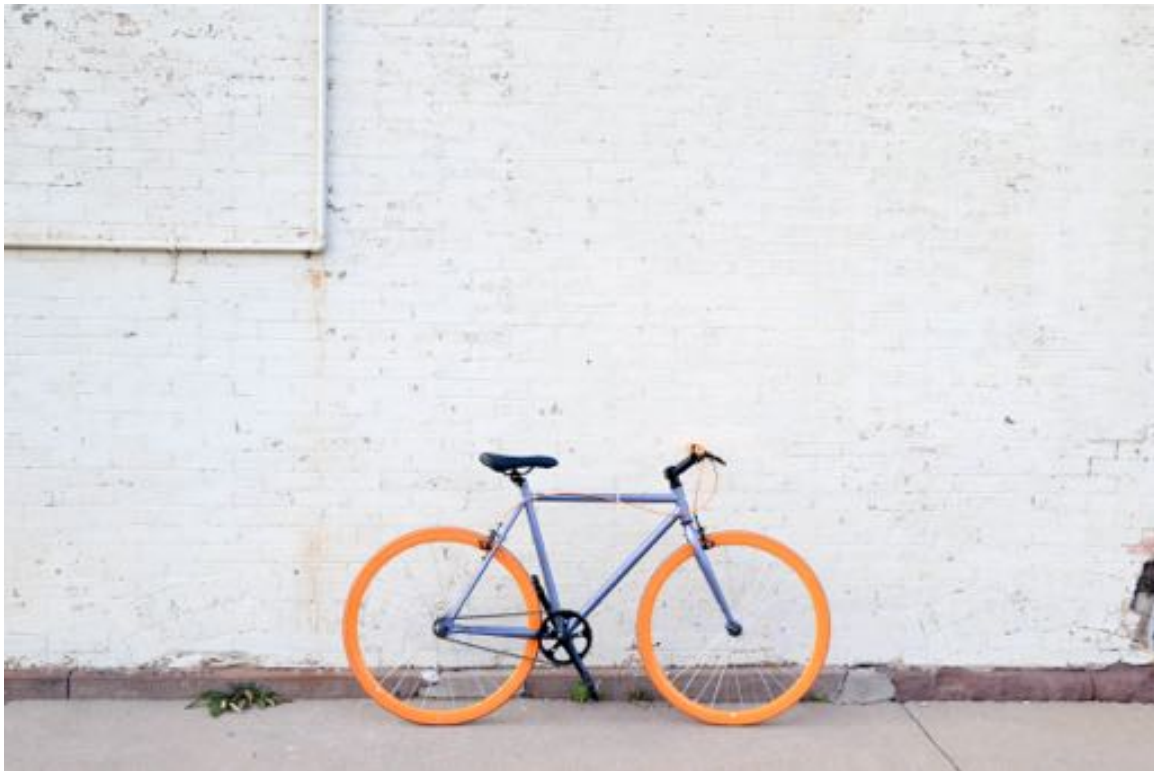
First of all, let me remind you what negative space is. Negative space is the space between and around objects in a photo. The key to using it effectively is to understand that it's very important for your composition because it surrounds your subject and thus is sort of part of the subject.



In this photo, the sky is the negative space

The Functions of Negative Space

The main function of negative space is to define your main subject. It also helps the viewer's eye to focus on the subject because it provides the space around it. A photo with too little negative space looks cluttered and is difficult for the brain to process. Negative space gives breathing room, creates composition, and balances the photo.



Using Negative Space

The main purpose of negative space is to enhance the composition of your photos. It's especially effective when you go for minimalism. Our eye can single out objects even in a crowded scene and focus on them, but the camera can't do that. That's why a lot of scenes that we think look good look horrible when you take a photo of them. Negative space can help you to improve your photos if you concentrate on it instead of the object when composing your photos. Doing that will make you pay more attention to composition rather than just seeing the object the way humans (not camera lenses) see it.

When you are touching up and cropping your photo, make sure the positive and negative spaces create a balanced composition where the eye is drawn to the subject. Play with the cropping and you'll understand negative space better than ever before.

How to Use Color to Enhance Composition

While the colors in your photos are very important, they can also act as a tool to help you enhance composition. An artist can decide which colors to use but a photographer needs to locate them there and then and use what's available to the maximum.

Here are some tips and ideas that will help you to enhance your composition with the use of color.

Silhouette Photography

Creating silhouettes against a glowing sunset sky is probably the most commonly used trick. If you do things right, the effect can be stunning. This technique is ideal for times when your subject can't be properly exposed or when you want to concentrate on background colors.



When Less Is More

If you like minimalism, then you'll enjoy taking photos of almost monochrome objects or backgrounds with a single spot of contrasting color. In a way, you'll be using selective color without editing your photos in Photoshop or another editor. And while this technique has its limits, you'll find thousands of ways to use it.



Shining Photos

Another great technique is to use backlight. This technique creates a very special atmosphere and truly makes your photos shine. Be careful with backlight though, because setting the right exposure can be tricky. Configuring exposure manually is ideal, but if you are not 100% comfortable with it, take several shots of the same subject using exposure compensation.



These are just a few ideas on how to use color and light to enhance your photos. Feel free to experiment and let your creativity guide you to truly stunning photography.

Now that you know how to compose your photos, let's return to one of the most important technical skills - focus. Using focus correctly and exploring the possibilities various focus settings create will help you to develop your photography skills even further and wow viewers with your stunning shots.

Some Tips for Better Autofocus

If you've just bought a shiny new DSLR, you may have trouble getting sharp photos. You will discover that your camera's autofocus has a mind of its own and often "misses" the things you want to photograph. Let's explore how you can use your camera's autofocus feature to your advantage.

Use the Right Focus Mode

Your DSLR (and even your compact camera) gives you a choice of several focus modes. The mode you choose will depend on what you're photographing.

If you're shooting a still subject (landscape, portrait, still life and so on), you should enable AF-S on a Nikon camera or One-Shot autofocus on a Canon. When this mode is on, your camera will focus on a subject and it will keep the focus even if you move the camera to recompose the shot.



If you are shooting a moving subject, like a car or a person playing sports, you should select the AF-C on a Nikon ("C" stands for continuous) or AI Servo autofocus. With this mode on, your camera will track the moving subject and keep it in focus.≥

Choose the Right AF Selection Mode

All DSLR cameras have at least two AF selection modes. When you're taking photos, you need to make sure you are using the correct one – e.g. the mode that lets you focus your camera on your subject.

The first AF mode offers automatic AF point selection meaning that all points are active and the camera will try to focus on an object that is near it. This works for most photos, but if you need to focus on something that is not nearest to one of your AF points, you'll be in trouble. For example, if you have a bush in the foreground, the camera will focus on the bush and not on your subject. You can

fix the problem by selecting a single AF point mode (or manual AF selection). This will let you choose which AF point you want to use, so that you can focus on your subject and not on something else.

Compose Your Shot Correctly

And last but not least, make sure that you compose your shot using your AF points. You may stick to any of the AF points (even those that are not in the center). Choose the point that is closest to you or the one that covers the subject and you'll be on the right track.

How to Avoid Blurry Photos

So you've been taking photos of something exceptionally beautiful or interesting. Then you upload them to your computer and see that they are blurry and good-for-nothing. That's a huge disappointment that happens to even the best photographers, but most of the time this happens to beginners. So, let's have a look at what you can do to avoid blurry photos.

Adjust Your Shutter Speed

The most common reason for blurry photos is too slow shutter speed. This usually happens when you are shooting in conditions where there is not enough light, so that your camera adjusts the shutter speed to match the low light conditions. The problem is that it's next to impossible to hold your camera absolutely still for even as little as 30 seconds. As a result, you get a blurry throwaway shot even if you are using a lens with an optical stabilizer.

To fix this, you have to adjust your shutter speed to make the shot quicker and thus avoid camera shake. It's easy when you are using a DSLR. The right shutter speed depends on several factors such as the size of your lens, light conditions and even the way you hold your camera, so make sure you take several shots of the same subject using different settings to get it right.

Use a Tripod

Sometimes there is no way you can adjust your shutter speed and get a crisp photo in lower light conditions. That's why you should invest in a sturdy tripod and a remote shutter release for your camera. The tripod will make sure there is no camera shake and a remote shutter release will help you to take photos without creating the dreaded camera shake by pressing the shutter release button.

When setting up your tripod, make sure it's absolutely stable and the weight of the camera doesn't make it wobbly. Adjust the leg height as needed and use objects like flat stones or wood planks to stabilize the tripod if the length of the legs is not enough.



Proper use of a tripod

OK, so now you know what you can do to prevent your photos from looking blurry. But what if you want them to be fuzzy on purpose? I'm talking about situations when you want to shoot these oh-so-artistic bokeh photos. Continue reading for some tips.

The Art of Being Out of Focus: Bokeh

We all love those beautiful photos with a dreamy blurry background and magical spots of light. That effect is called Bokeh and it's all about the aesthetic quality of the blur created in the out-of-focus parts of an image produced by a lens. "Bokeh" means "blur" or "haze" in Japanese, so that gives you a very good idea of what's important in this type of photography.



Be Close to Your Subject

Most photography blogs will tell you that you need to use the right lens to have nice bokeh. But what if you don't have a DSLR? Well, the good news is that any lens, even your smartphone camera, can produce some kind of bokeh if you do everything correctly. Try to get close to the subject, as close as possible without it becoming completely out of focus or not fitting the frame. You should get some bokeh effect that way.



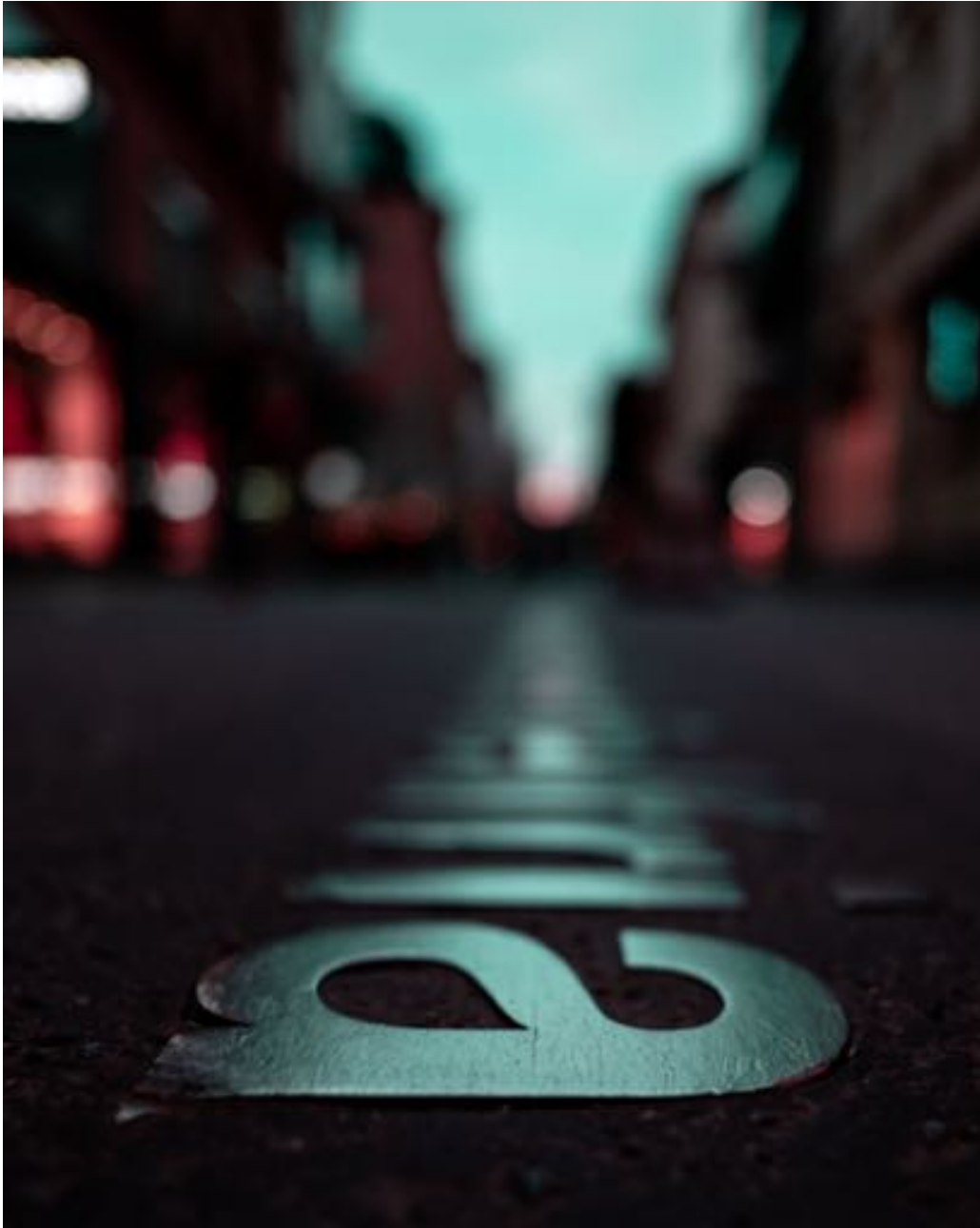
Have Enough Space Between the Subject and the Background

It's not at all hard to achieve bokeh if your subject is far enough from the background. Things become blurry in the distance and that is true for both our eyes and the camera. So, make sure there's enough space between your subject and the background.



Use a Shallow Depth of Field

Getting nice bokeh requires a shallow depth of field. You can achieve that by selecting a large aperture. If your camera allows it, select a small aperture number like f/1.8 and watch the lovely blur appear in your photos.



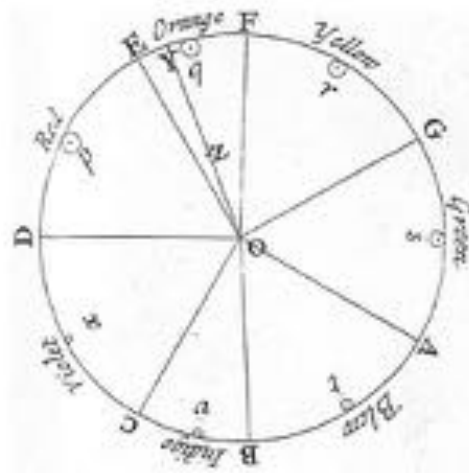
At this point you should have some idea about focus and composition. Now it's time for a bit of color theory.

How to Use the Color Wheel to Enhance Your Photos

No doubt you've heard of the color theory and the color wheel, but did you ever think about it when taking photos? Probably not. Let's explore how you can use the color wheel and basic color theory to improve your photos.

The Color Wheel Theory

First of all, let's recap the color wheel theory. The first known color wheel was created by Sir Isaac Newton in 1665-1666. It was a pretty cool one too because it correlated colors with musical notes and planetary symbols.



Newton's color wheel

But from the color spectrum point of view, it doesn't compare to the modern one with all its various shades of color.

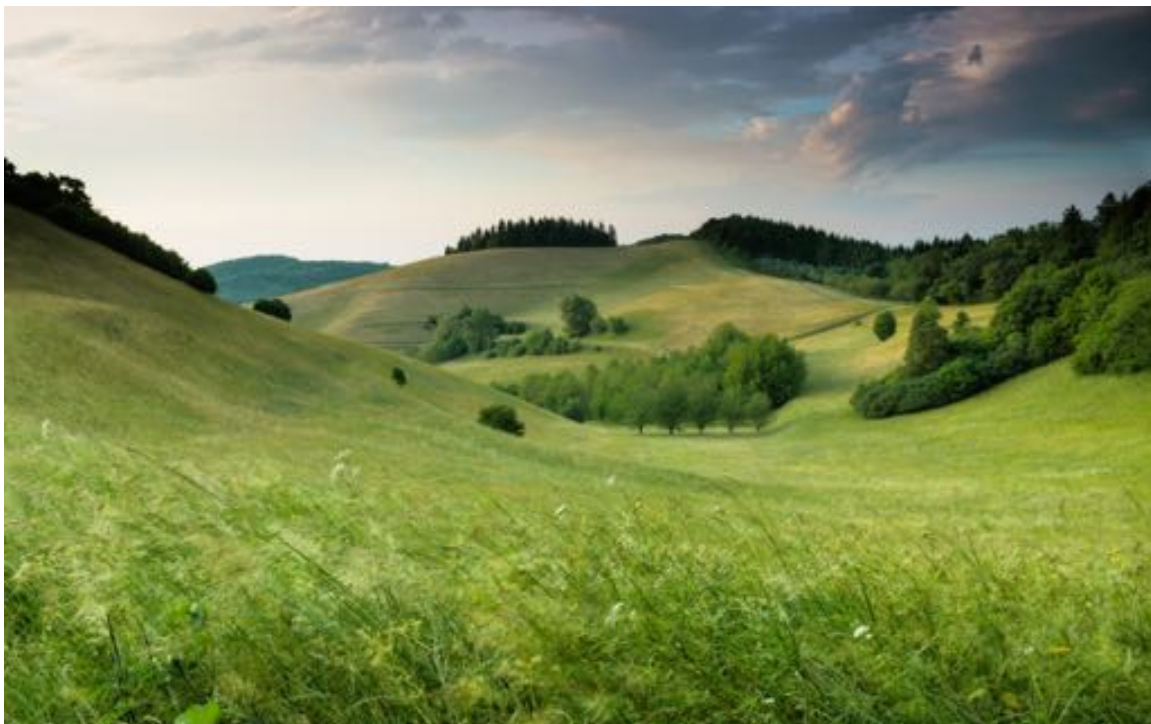


Modern color wheel

The color wheel is a handy tool for every artist and photographer because it shows the relationships between primary, secondary and tertiary colors. There are analogous colors such as green, light green and yellow, and there are complementary colors, such as yellow and purple. You'll find the analogous colors side by side on the color wheel. The complementary colors are opposite each other. While analogous colors create a natural harmony, it's the complementary colors that give your artworks and photos contrast.

Using Analogous Colors

If you want to create a sense of calm and peace with your photography, analogous colors should dominate your photo. Good examples of photos that mainly use similar colors are landscapes where most of the photo is green (countryside), blue (seascapes) or orange (sunsets). Be careful with sticking to analogous colors only, though, because that's the road to boring photos.



Adding Contrast with Complementary Colors

Why does everyone love a photo of an orange balloon against the blue sky? Or a red poppy in a green field? Because these photos use complementary colors in the right proportion. One color or a set of analogous colors should dominate your photo and the complementary color should be the contrasting element. A good example is a yellow autumn leaf on dark purple waters.



Using complementary colors in your photography will make it more dramatic and draw the viewer's eye to the contrasting elements.

When looking for color in a scene, most of the time your eye will guide you and tell you which colors work together. After all, color perception is a very natural thing!

Using the color wheel to compose your photos will help to make them more striking and meaningful. And meaningful photography is what should be your aim. In the next chapter, let's see what you can do to add meaning to your photos.

Adding Meaning to Your Photography

Digital cameras are a luxury in terms of making the life of a photography a lot easier. When we used film cameras, we couldn't allow ourselves to take hundreds of shots of literally everything. We used to be choosy and treasured the film in our cameras, making sure we took only meaningful photos. Don't get me wrong, I love the freedom digital cameras offer, but don't you feel that we've lost something? We take so many photos of everything that the truly meaningful shots get lost in the clutter. Here are some tips that will help you to fix that.

Tell Stories

A picture is worth a thousand words, but only when it tells a story. It's up to you how you find your stories and how you choose to tell them. But you should always try to make things interesting for those who are viewing your photos. Make sure you maintain the fine balance between creating and observing, and adjust your shooting techniques to your style of storytelling.



Find a Unique Concept

Every person is unique, which means that every event, image or scene has a different meaning to each of us. Try to express your own unique concept in your photos and show others how you see the world through your camera lens. Stick

to your concept and don't be afraid to experiment. Try to work with developing scenes – they will help you to tell your stories.



Don't Rush

When we see something that might turn out to be a good photo, we tend to grab the camera and take several shots immediately. Naturally, that's the best tactic for sports, animal and street photography because you need to act quickly or the moment will be gone. But if you have the time, reflect and think about the shot you're about to make. Try to make the photo show the scene and transmit your emotions and feelings at the same time. That will help you to take meaningful photos and avoid cluttering your SD card with junk shots.

Catch the Moment

If you're doing street photography, then capturing the story is even more important than with other genres. What makes street photography interesting and captivating? A pretty face? A nice background? Not really. It's the story.



When you're planning to take some shots, look at people in the street and try to see beyond their clothes and hairstyle. Try to see an emotion, an idea – something that tells a story, makes the viewer look at the photo and think about the people in it. What's just happened to them? What's going to happen next? Your photo has to speak to the viewer.

Capture Expression

How many times have you seen the potential for a fabulous street shot, but as you fumble with your camera, the mood dissipates. By the time you make the actual shot, you're left with a mediocre photo of a person walking with a blank expression. Don't worry, this happens to all photographers and it happens often. Just keep it in mind and always try to capture an expression. A good thing to do is to practice watching people, so that you can learn to predict expressions and moments that are worth capturing.

Don't Forget the Light and the Background

A lot of photography genres are focused on the people in the shot. But as a photographer, you need to pay attention to other important things like composition, light and the background. Combined with a story and a strong emotion, all these elements will create a powerful photograph.



And last but not least, keep practicing. Try to take interesting shots, find promising subjects and always keep your eyes open for something that's going on in your neighborhood, in a nearby cafe, or even when you are jogging.

Now that we've talked about composition and subject in general, I'll share with you some tips for specific photography genres like landscape photography, portraits, food photography, and more.

Landscape Photography

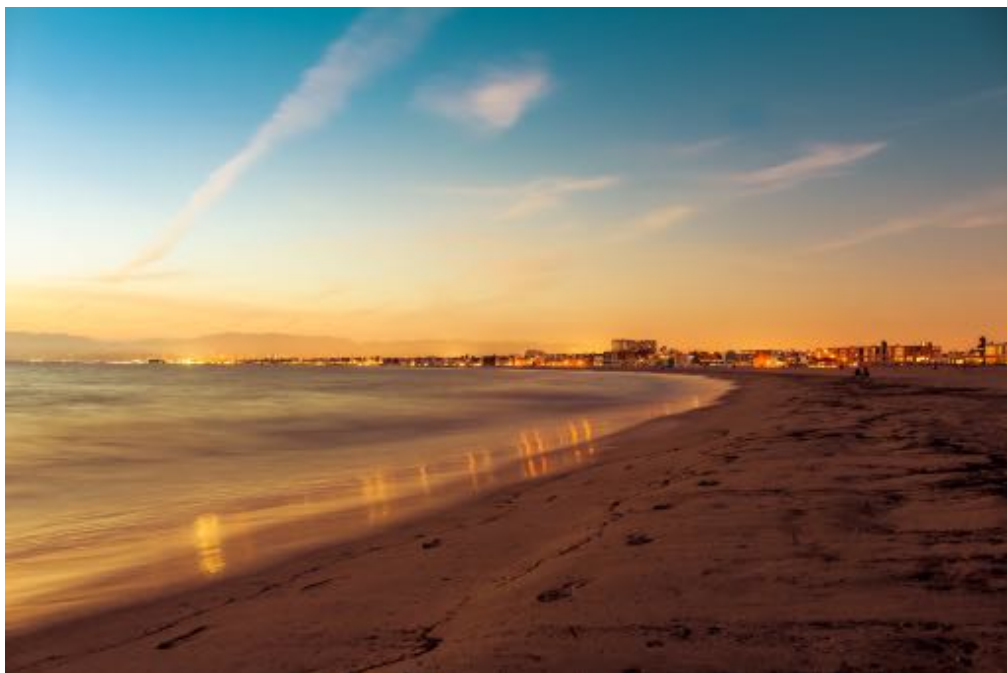
Landscape photography is perhaps the most popular photography genre, partly because nature is a captivating subject and partly because a lot of people think it's easy to take landscape photos. That's not exactly true as there is more to shooting great landscapes than you might think. Let's see what you can do to take better landscape photos and make them truly breathtaking.

Find the Right Location

Location is key to great landscape photography. To be fair, if you live somewhere where there are no photographic opportunities for landscapes, you can't expect to shoot anything spectacular. So you may need to research interesting and beautiful locations near where you live and plan several photography trips. Google will help you to do that – search for the place where you live and check out the image search to get inspiration.

Choose the Time of Day that Works

Many landscape photographers state that the Golden Hours (the time just after sunrise and just before sunset) is the best time for all kinds of photography. I can't disagree with that because those hours have a very special light that makes your photos shine. But sometimes you may prefer to shoot your landscapes when the sun is high to capture the beautiful blue sky and white clouds (just avoid having sharp shadows in your photos).



You may also choose to take your photos during the Blue Hour (the time when dusk settles and the sky is dark blue). The Blue Hour is great for cityscapes.

No matter which hour you choose, always watch how the light moves and plan your shot to get the best possible lighting.



Have a Foreground

A very common mistake made by beginners when shooting landscapes is lack of foreground. A landscape without a foreground doesn't hold the viewer's eye the same way as a landscape with a foreground does. If the scene allows, make sure there is a foreground subject somewhere in the lower third of your composition.



Don't Clutter Your Composition

Sometimes you take a shot of a stunningly beautiful landscape only to find that the photo is nowhere near as beautiful as the original. This is because our eye can isolate things and the camera can't do that. If the scene is cluttered, the photo will lose that special something. Try to declutter the scene by removing a rock, a branch, or shooting from a different angle to avoid a tree getting in the way. As a rule, go from more to less and select the best shot when you have several you can compare.

Choose Your Equipment

Even if you are shooting landscapes with a compact camera (although a DSLR with proper lenses will give you more room for creativity), you will need the following:

- A tripod to avoid camera shake, which is especially important when you are shooting in low light condition. A sturdy tripod is a must.
- Remove shutter release (cable or wireless) to avoid camera shake. Again, this is a must-have to get clear shots.
- If you have a DSLR, consider getting a wide-angle lens. It works best for landscapes.

Camera Settings

While there is no universal recipe for landscape photography settings, here are some tips that will help you to configure your camera correctly and achieve the best results:

- Make sure everything in your scene is in focus.
- If you can, set a manual white balance to avoid neutralized colors.
- When shooting flowing water, consider using long exposure to give it a silky look.
- When shooting in bright sunshine, underexpose your images a little bit. You will be able to compensate for that later using postproduction software.
- Use a polarizing filter to give your photos a more dramatic and detailed look, enhance the colors, and get a more realistic image.

OK, so those are the basics you need to know about landscapes in general. But what about travel photography and special seasonal landscapes? Let's move on to the next chapter and learn all about them!

How to Take Better Photos on Your Next Trip

Everybody loves traveling and discovering new places. The only difference is the extent of our travels – some go to exotic places far away from home, whereas others prefer a quiet drive to a nice place that's not too far away from where they live. No matter what type of traveler you are, I'm sure we all have one thing in common: we love taking travel photos. Now, it doesn't really matter whether you use your iPhone camera or carry a DSLR with you because you can take stunning photos with pretty much any equipment (yes, even your grandpa's ancient film camera). So, let's see what you need to keep in mind to take photos that will be worth printing.

Plan Your Trip

Sometimes it's very tempting to have a totally unplanned trip where you play everything by ear. But if you want to catch the best light when you are taking photos of stunning landscapes and landmarks along the way, it's good to plan where you're going to be and when. Your goal is to plan for the golden hour, a sunny afternoon, or the blue hour. With some planning, you'll catch the scenes when they look their best. If you don't manage to get to a scene on time, don't fret and use your creative power to take great photos.

Try to Capture Your Feelings and the Spirit of the Place

Go on, have a look at the photos from your last trip. You'll see that most of them are snapshots of something insignificant and meaningless. I'm sure you'll stare at some of them and think, "Why on earth did I take this photo?"

Photos like this usually happen when you are frantically pressing the shutter release button just to capture the place and to tell your friends that you've been there. These photos have no emotion, they don't express your feelings and neither do they capture the spirit of the place.

When you are taking a photo of something, don't do it in a hurry. Look at the subject and try to understand what sort of emotions it triggers. Try to look at it from different angles and find just the right spot that allows you to see your subject in a unique way. Your subject doesn't always have to be something spectacular - often a simple rock on a beach makes a memorable photo.



These beach rocks in the foreground make Staithes look miniature

Don't Let Your Stuff Drag You Down

Fumbling for your camera, balancing your bag on your arm when trying to take a photo with your phone, carrying lots of heavy equipment... the list goes on. I'm sure all this sounds familiar. Carrying too much stuff with you doesn't help you take great photos, so try to cut your equipment to the minimum or at least use a bag that doesn't get in the way (a lightweight backpack usually does the trick). If you are a DSLR user, here's the equipment you will need:

- Your DSLR
- Your main lens + a wide-angle lens for landscape photography (if you use one)
- A polarizing filter
- A cloth to clean the lens
- A lightweight, yet sturdy tripod
- A backup battery
- A remote shutter release
- An extra memory card
- A waterproof backpack to carry all that

Look for Unique Places and Subjects

When you travel to popular locations, you need to keep in mind that thousands of others visit them too. For your photography, this means that the scene will often be crowded and lots of people will take very similar photos. Consider sidestepping the crowds as the world is filled with places I call “hidden gems”. Don’t miss them on your travels and you’ll return with lots of beautiful and unique photos.



Yorkshire Dales, UK

It’s up to you whether your photos will speak through HDR, interesting angles, empty streets, or the people you meet – just make sure that they communicate your point of view and your feelings.

Catch the Magic of Fall and Winter Landscapes

Fall and winter are the seasons when you can take the most spectacular landscape photos. However, the weather conditions usually make it difficult to take good photographs. In this chapter, I've put together some tips that will help you with fall and winter photography.

Fall Landscape Photography

Fall is a landscape photographer's dream because it's the season when nature gives so many opportunities for absolutely stunning shots. There are amazing colors all around us and the textures are very interesting too. Avoid the temptation to take hundreds of photos in hope that they will turn out great. Instead, follow the instructions from this chapter.

Catch the Light

One of the issues you will face when taking photos in autumn is that it's not all that easy to catch the right light. Autumn days can be really dull and even when it's sunny, the light is often not right for good photos. The best way to shoot autumn landscapes is to prepare the composition, be patient and wait for interesting and dramatic light. When the light is just right, all you need to do is take your shot.



Use Fall Colors as the Background

It's so tempting to shoot autumn foliage again and again because no two shots will ever be the same. But don't forget that autumn colors are a fantastic background for lots of other things – houses, waterfalls, bicycles – anything you want!

Isolate the Subject

Isolating the subject will help you to add contrast to your autumn photos by drawing a fine line between reality and your imagination. This way you will be able to draw the viewer into your photos and share your vision of the world. Using a wide aperture (around 2.8) will help you to do that.

Look for Natural Contrasts

You can accentuate naturally bright foliage colors by placing them on a contrasting background. It can be blue sky (yellow looks great against blue), a dark cloud, a mountain and so on. You'll see how much more dramatic your photos will look.



Winter Landscape Photography

Winter landscapes can look serene, magical and even dramatic. True, the cold weather is annoying and good light is hard to catch, but all that snow and frost provides lots of great photography opportunities. Just grab your camera, switch on your imagination and create your personal winter wonderland. Here are some tips that will help you to get started.

Plan Your Route

When you go on a photography excursion during the summer months, you have the luxury of warm weather and long hours of daylight. Winter doesn't give you all that, so you'll need to plan your route in advance. Try to find places that look good in snow. These could be parks with secluded benches and quaint lampposts, or something more rural where you can spot a snow-covered barn. It's up to you which location to choose, but you need to plan your trip in advance to catch the maximum amount of daylight. And don't forget to check the weather forecast, so that you don't get snowed in!

Protect Your Camera and Yourself

When going on a winter photography quest, you have to take into account possible bad weather. While the cold is not so bad for your camera, snow or rain can do some real damage. If you have a DSLR, make sure you choose your lens for the day at home and attach it, and use a protective case for your camera body. You can make a DIY raincoat for your camera from an ordinary plastic bag and some tape (don't forget to bring some bags and a roll of tape with you just in case).



It's also a good idea to take something to wipe the moisture from your camera lens. Microfiber cloth works best.

Make sure you dress appropriately to protect yourself from the snow, rain and cold. It's up to you how to dress, but I recommend using thinner gloves instead of thick ones. If you have to, put on two pairs of thinner ones. That would make taking photos more manageable than if you are wearing bulky gloves.

Don't Let the Snow Trick Your Camera

Nothing is worse than coming home from a winter photography trip only to find a bunch of nasty grey photos. The snow is so white and so bright that it can trick your camera's settings if you are not using full manual controls. To make sure this doesn't happen, check your camera's settings before you start taking photos. Most cameras have a special scene mode for shooting snow, so choose that if you can't be bothered to configure everything manually. You can also raise your exposure a bit, but be careful and don't make the photos too light because that will erase all the details.



Last but not least, don't be lazy and take several shots of the same scene using different settings. The more RAW shots you take, the better your chance to create a perfect winter photo.

Portraits

Now that we've covered a lot of landscape photography tips and tricks, let's explore another popular genre - portraits.

Nothing is as gratifying as capturing the real beauty and emotion of a person, especially if it's someone close to you. As an amateur, you'll most likely start exploring portrait photography by taking photos of your friends and family. You might move forward to taking portraits of other people in time, but for now it will most likely be the people you know. This makes things both easy and difficult. It's certainly helpful when you know your subjects and their likely reactions, but it's kind of hard to show them the pictures because their expectations might be higher than your photography skills. So, let's work on those skills of yours! Here are some portrait photography tips to help you get started.

Don't Force People to Smile

Have a look at some of your photos and I bet you will see lots of people shots where everybody looks like they are choking because they are really making an effort to smile. Never say things like "Hold still!" or "Smile!" because that will make your subjects feel uncomfortable. If they feel uncomfortable, they will look uncomfortable in the photo. Your job is to make your subjects feel relaxed and look natural because that's the ticket to shooting great portraits.

Take the Photos from Their Eye Level

Have you ever been photographed from below? I'm sure you have and I'm pretty certain you hate that photo. Photos from below are not flattering at best and that's why you should avoid shooting from that particular angle unless you are going for a certain effect. For the best possible portrait shot, take your photo either from your subject's eye level or from slightly above.

Make Everything Simple

The first rule of taking great and realistic portraits is to avoid overcomplicating everything. Let the subjects work for you in the most natural surroundings. Try to take photos of people using natural light, level backgrounds and avoid things like horizon lines running through people's heads. It's important to remember that the people (not the details that surround them) are the subject of your photos.



Shoot Portraits at an Angle

Another way to make your portrait photography more interesting is to shoot at an angle. Doing this will help you to avoid boring passport-like photos. Ask your subject to look away from the lens a bit, make them twist their waist a bit and follow the direction of their face. You'll see, you'll be able to create beautiful and natural-looking portraits.

Find the Best Camera Settings and Use Them

All digital cameras are different. While some of you may use DSLRs that have all the settings you can dream of, some may use a simple point-and-shoot camera or a mobile phone camera. By now you should know enough about exposure, f-stop, aperture and the rest, but it's still OK to use automatic settings if you feel more comfortable with that. It doesn't make you less of a photographer. But since I have a Nikon DSLR, I'm going to share some settings that I use:

- I usually shoot portraits in **Aperture Priority** mode, which is the most fool-proof mode for photographing people.
- I always shoot in **RAW** because that lets me easily touch up and enhance the photos in Lightroom and Photoshop.
- In most situations, I **underexpose** portraits by one stop to avoid overexposure and bring forward the details.

And one last bit of advice – feel free to experiment, go beyond the standard headshot and try to catch the mood and the spirit of the person you are photographing.

The DOs and DON'Ts of Family Portraits

Family photos, especially family portraits, are among the most popular photos taken around the globe. As someone who has a lot of relatives, I know how difficult it is to snap a great-looking family portrait. That's why I've decided to share with you some DOs and DON'Ts of photographing your family. Hopefully, these simple tips will help you to create stunning photos.

Make Everyone Stand or Sit Closer to Each Other

We all try to make our family portraits look as natural as possible, but that doesn't mean that you can't "edit" real-life situations. Under normal circumstances, your family members won't be sitting or standing as close to each other as you'd like for a photo. So don't be shy to ask everyone to move closer together. This will not only make them fit nicely, but also fill the portrait with that special family warmth.

Take the Photos When Nobody's Blinking

We all know that you can take as many shots as you want with your digital camera, so blinking doesn't really matter, right? Wrong! When you are taking a photo of a large group of people, the chance that someone will have their eyes closed when you take the photo is pretty high. You can take as many shots as you like and you'll still have someone blinking. My advice is to learn to quickly look at your subjects and not to waste time when pressing the shutter button. Another trick is to set your camera mode to continuous and take several photos in one go.

Get Genuine Smiles

A beautiful family portrait always has genuine smiles. It's no use to tell everyone to smile – they'll just look like they are forcing their smiles, or worse – like they want to kill the photographer. Try to be funny, do everything you can to make sure everyone is relaxed and looks natural. That way you will get beautiful faces in your family portrait.



And now let's discuss some family portrait DON'Ts that will help you to avoid very common mistakes.

Don't Allow Subjects to Tilt Their Heads

Family portraits make people do funny things. The most popular unconscious thing to do is for everyone to tilt their heads and try to squeeze into the photo. I do that, you do that, everybody does that. But as a photographer you should never allow that to happen because tilting and squeezing makes your subjects look unnatural and spoils the portrait.

Don't Let Grandma Run the Show

While it's good to let your family come up with ideas for the portrait, it's not at all advisable to let the family matriarch (or patriarch) run the show. I'm sure they will have lots of things to criticize as well as suggestions they think are really valuable, but you are the photographer and you know what will look best. Oh, and don't let parents scare kids into looking rigid and terrified in the portrait. Remember, you are going for the happy natural look.

Come to think of it, photographing children deserves some extra tips. I'll cover them in the next chapter.

Photographing Children

Children's expressions are so open and their emotions are so genuine, that the photos can become true masterpieces. Or not. Photographing children presents some challenges, especially if you're a beginner.

Prepare Everything You Need in Advance

This tip applies to all photography sessions, but it's especially important for children's photography. Children get tired faster and have a shorter attention span, so you need to be as efficient as possible.



Pick Your Timing and Location

When you are planning your photo session, pick the time and place that will be comfortable for everyone. Small children are the happiest after a snack and a nap, so you may want to make sure they aren't tired and hungry.

If you want to photograph them outdoors, pick a beautiful yet safe location. For indoor photos, make sure there is enough room for everyone.

Get to the Kids' Eye Level

Another important thing to remember is to get down to the child's eye level. Although it may feel uncomfortable to crouch with your camera, the results will be worth the trouble.



Take the Most Difficult Shots at the Beginning

Because children have a shorter attention span, it's a good idea to do the most difficult shots right at the beginning of the session while the child is still focused. It's a great time to take poses and more formal shots, as well as shots where you are limiting the child's movement.

Photographing Still Life, Food and Flowers

Hey, I want to congratulate you for getting this far! Look how much we've covered already - **exposure, focus, light, composition, landscape and portrait photography**. That's quite a few topics, but it's not all of them. We have more exciting photography subjects to cover, such as **still life, food, and flowers**. Let's get started!

Photographing Still Life

Have you ever looked at fabulous still life photos and wondered how the photographer accomplished such a stunning result? Still life photography is an art of its own. Like any art, it can be mastered.

Construct the Image

Unlike other photography genres where you are capturing a moment rather than an image, still life photography gives you the luxury of spending as much time as you need to construct your photograph. Is it going to be a flat lay shot or a traditionally composed photo where the items are standing rather than lying on the surface?



Flat lay photography is extremely popular right now

When shooting still life, you can compose everything – the background, the lighting, the subject or subjects, and arrange things the way you want. So take your time and compose the perfect image before you start shooting. Being patient will pay off.



Experiment with Lighting

Shooting still life photography is a great start for those who don't own fancy equipment. You don't need anything special to light a still life scene, but you can and should experiment with the brightness of the light, its angle, and its color temperature. Are you going to use natural light? Or perhaps use flash? Or a softbox? When using artificial light, pay attention to color temperature. Around 6000K gives you cold white light, 3500-4000K is natural white light, and 2700K is warm white.

Take your time to experiment with your light's intensity and angle. Unless you are using natural light, you should be able to easily move the light source around. And if you're using the light from a window, make sure you can easily move your subject.



Example of warm light

Choose the Right Background

A good choice of background for your still life photo can really make the final image stand out. You can use pretty much anything – a wall, cardboard, fabric, wood, a large object, a mirror and so on. Just remember the golden rule for finding a good background: it should not distract the viewer from the subject. Avoid busy patterns and bright colors for your backgrounds because they can be a nuisance and ruin your composition.



Food, Glorious Food

Food photography is fun and it looks very impressive when done the right way. But making food look delicious in a photo is not as simple as taking a photo of your plate. In this chapter, let's explore a few tricks that will help you to take appetizing photos of food.

Avoid Using Flash

When you're shooting food, it's best to avoid using flash because it will make the food in the photo look flat and artificial by taking away all the little natural shadows. Your best bet is to use natural light.



Use a Tripod

If you're following my first bit of advice and taking food photos without a flash using natural light, you really need a tripod. A tripod will help you stabilize your camera and avoid blurry and shaky photos when the lighting is not ideal. This is especially true for DSLRs when the exposure is set for longer than 1/60 of a second. You can find reasonably priced tripods on Amazon.

Find a Good Angle

Like every other subject, food will look its best in your photo when you take your shot from the right angle. Try to experiment and take photos from different positions. For example, some dishes look their best when the photo is taken directly from above, while others look stunning when the photo is taken from the side. Shoot several photos of the same recipe from different angles and then keep the best ones.



Respect the Color Theory

The color theory is just as valid for food photography as for anything else (now is a great time to re-read the color theory chapter). If possible, add some complementing colors to your shots to make them look appetizing.



Photographing Flowers and Blossoms

Don't you just love looking at beautiful magazine-like photos of flowers and blossoms? Well, the good news is that you can take stunning flower photos like that with a bit of practice and the right equipment. My goal is to give you some tips that will work both with a DSLR and a smartphone, so that you achieve great results regardless of the equipment you use.

Use a Macro Mode or a Macro Lens

When you think of blossom photos, close-up shots are the first that come to mind. Nothing looks as delicate and beautiful than a close-up of a cherry blossom branch or a beautiful daffodil. The only problem is that most beginners end up having these photos out of focus where the subject is blurred instead of the background.

The easiest way to avoid this is to use a Macro mode that most compact cameras have (usually there's a flower sign next to the control that enables it). And if you have a DSLR, it may be a good idea to invest in a macro lens. That's not the same thing as a zoom lens because zoom lenses will often not work for close-ups.



Disable Autofocus

Autofocus is a great feature but it doesn't always do your close-up photography any favors. I bet you know how frustrating it is when you keep trying to make your camera focus where you want it to and it just won't do that! If your camera supports manual focusing (all DSLRs do and now most smartphones have that feature too), switch to that. You will be able to focus exactly where you want and take your photo the way you want it.



Shoot from Various Viewpoints

When you find a good subject for a photo, take your time and check how it looks from different viewpoints. Better still, take several photos from different angles. You can always sort through the shots later on your computer and choose the best pictures.

Find Great Backgrounds

Do you sometimes wish that your blossoming branch had the sky for a background instead of a net of other twigs? While I'm strongly against damaging nature and breaking off blossoming branches, you can always ask a friend to change the angle of a twig and hold it against the sky while you're taking your photo. If you are photographing cut flowers, take some time to arrange the background and compose your photo. It's well worth it.

When shooting indoors, find a very simple background. Colorful flowers look great on a black background, but you can also experiment with other colors, like creamy white, tender yellow, and so on.



Use Soft Light to Avoid Sharp Shadows

Flowers are delicate creations and you'd want them to look that way in your photos. In most cases, flowers look their best when they are shot in soft light, which doesn't produce sharp shadows. The result is an evenly lit subject with every single detail clearly visible. To achieve this, avoid shooting in direct sunlight and wait for the sun to go behind a cloud. And if you're shooting indoors, avoid using flash at all costs.

Well, we've covered all the basics of digital photography now. Isn't this exciting? Now let's move on to the final chapter and explore how to choose your best photos without spending countless hours doing so.

How to Choose Your Best Photos

What's the most time-consuming and frustrating part of photography? If you ask me, it's sorting through your shots and trying to choose the best ones. All those unedited photos look so similar and there is so much junk that it's easy to get annoyed and leave your images as an unsorted digital pile. Worse still, you could spend hours looking at your photos, agonizing which ones to keep and which to delete. If this sounds familiar, read on and hopefully these tips will help!

Don't Let Unsorted Photos Accumulate

The worst mistake photographers make is when they let shots from different sessions accumulate in one bloated "Unsorted" folder. Make it a habit to sort through your photos as soon as you come back from a session.

Another thing to remember is to avoid taking too many shots in the first place. If you still remember the days of film cameras, imagine that you don't have the luxury of unlimited storage space and compose your photos well before you release the shutter.

Eliminate Photos with Distractions in Them

No matter how hard you try to compose your photos, most of the time distractions will be present in your shots. It can be a power cable, a garden hose, etc. When you are sorting through your photos, your job is to check the shots with distractions in them and decide whether they are worth spending extra time eliminating distractions with Photoshop, or if you have other, better shots. Sometimes it's worth it to fix such photos, but often you can safely delete them.

Get Rid of Low-Quality Photos

Low-quality shots are inevitable – sometimes you shoot a blurry image (always zoom in when you are sorting through your photos to detect those shots), mess up the white balance badly, or your image ends up much too dark. These photos have to go. You can use software to help you find all those low-quality shots, especially if you have lots of similar photos. Duplicate Photo Cleaner is my personal favorite because it has flexible image similarity settings, is very easy to use, and is exceptionally fast. In my experience, using Duplicate Photo Cleaner saved me hours of boring work and let me concentrate on post-processing my best shots.

Manage Similar Photos

So you've made lots and lots of shots of the same subject. That's perfectly OK and that's what being a photographer is about. But then you face hours of work sorting through all those shots. The trick to selecting the best one is to find the one that has a special mood or shows a special emotion to its fullest. The rest can go. Once again, I recommend Duplicate Photo Cleaner or a similar program to help you with the task.

Don't Miss Brilliant Shots

Even though the point of this post is to help you sort through your photos quickly, you should always keep an eye out for shots that I call "hidden gems". When you are deleting stuff, it's very easy to miss a great shot or something that could become a great shot with a little bit of post-processing.

Final Words

Photography is an extremely rewarding hobby. But it's also a skill that you have to learn and develop. That takes time and a lot of practice. Over time, you'll notice that you start questioning your composition, trying new things, and becoming more comfortable using manual camera controls instead of simply using the Auto mode. You'll begin analyzing light and looking for interesting and unusual scenes when you're on a bus or walking down a busy street. Photography will change the way you see the world and that's one of the amazing parts of it.

In this book, we've covered all the basics you need to know to get started on your photography journey. Keep practicing and you will see how your photos become better as your skills improve. Remember to compare your photos once every couple of months - that's how you'll see how much progress you've made and stay motivated. Also, don't forget that everybody learns at different speeds, so don't get discouraged if you don't see great progress immediately.

Feedback is also very important for beginner photographers. Join a photography community to share your works with like-minded people and get friendly feedback and critiques. This can be a Facebook group, an online forum or a local club - the choice is yours.

The best way to improve your photography is by developing a solid foundation of skills that you can build upon. I hope that this book helped you to achieve that. Good luck!

Credits

Photos by:

Liz Donovan
Unsplash.com
Pixabay.com

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