

Introduction

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Equipment needed: none (although you may already have a digital camera and want to have it to hand when reading this chapter).



Skills needed: some confidence and enthusiasm.



Digital photography is one of the most popular hobbies around today. It's amazing to see how much it has grown in the past five years. This book is designed for anyone who wants to get involved and learn all about this exciting field, but has felt bewildered by the sheer choice of cameras out there and the overwhelming amount of paraphernalia that seems to be on sale in every high street store. What on earth do you need to get started? And how do you actually begin?

It is never too late to explore digital photography. Learning how to use a digital camera is a very rewarding experience. Feeling a little lost at first is completely understandable but it needn't be that way. The main thing to remember is that what makes a 'good' photo relies little on the type of camera you have – it's a matter of opinion!

An ideal composition, being in the right place at the right time and some decent lighting are important, but these are precisely the same rules that apply to traditional film photography!

Nor is there any need to 'upgrade' your camera every other year if it is perfectly capable of producing quality photographs, even if the advertisements and the pushy salespeople have you thinking otherwise. You will know when the time is right to get a new camera.

However, owning a camera that is easy to use and causes little worry is important, so I spend a lot of time on how you can choose the right one to suit your needs, particularly if you are new to such technology. There are also a few digital photography concepts that will help you make a good photo brilliant. A small tweak of the settings here and there when you are composing your image can really bring out the best of a situation.

How this book is structured

This book is divided into three parts. I think it's best if you read them in order but some people do like to dip in and out of chapters. If that sounds like you, please note that I assume you have some knowledge of concepts outlined in previous chapters.

Part I: Understanding your digital camera

The first part of the book starts by assuming no prior knowledge and explains the reasons why you might be interested in digital photography. I outline how digital photography is similar to (and different from) film, as well as some of the major terms you'll encounter when you're using your camera. There's a chapter on what to look out for when buying a camera and how to see through the salesperson's hype (ease of use is the most important thing).

The rest of Part I includes essential, illustrated chapters on taking your first photographs and the main features you'll find on your digital camera. In Chapter 8, there's a special emphasis on taking photos of children and animals. But really, the best way to get great shots is to practice and experiment. We all know that digital photography can produce some excellent results, so this book is more functional than artistic (although my contributors have provided some beautiful photographs!).

If you are hungry for more tips and photographs, there are many other resources at your disposal and I list some of them at the back of the book.

Part II: Entering the digital darkroom

The second part of the book is about the 'digital darkroom': step-by-step instructions show you how you can get your photographs on to your computer and what you can do with them from there.



If you are interested in using your computer to help you make the most of your digital photographs, I do assume a little prior knowledge of computing before you get started, including how to use a mouse, open a program, access files and folders within Windows and how to copy or move a file from one folder to another. Please refer to *Computing with Windows 7 for the Older and Wiser* should you need help with these tasks.

I go on to explain how you can store your photographs and keep them organised on your computer using free tools from Microsoft and Google (you may need to ask someone to help if you have no prior knowledge of installing a program on your computer). The remaining chapters in Part II introduce the concept of photo-editing software – this is the modern equivalent of the darkroom of old, without the smell of chemicals that I remember always ended up on your hands, no matter how hard you tried to avoid it!

I also include some easy fixes you can make to your photographs to instantly brighten them up or correct common problems, such as red eye (when flash photography turns your subject's eyes red) or incorrect colour balance (when unexpected colours turn up in your photos). If you are hungry for more, then I point you in the right direction, too.

Part III: Liberating your digital photos

The last part of the book explains how you can share your photographs with your friends, family and even the rest of the world (perhaps on email or by using an online photo album). People end up taking thousands of photographs but who gets to see them? I outline the types of home printer available, how you can print photographs at home and ways to share them with friends and family over the Internet. A little basic computing knowledge and prior experience of browsing the Web is assumed for some chapters, but even those who don't want to get involved with the computer side of things will find ways to circumvent them in this section!

Appendices

You'll find an extensive glossary here if you want a refresher on a particular definition. Both digital photography and computing terms you may come across are covered.

I also list a heap of useful websites and other resources for you to continue exploring and learning. Why not join an online community to discuss your new hobby?

Common worries

Here are some of the reasons I think people have delayed their foray into digital photography. Maybe one or more of these ‘worries’ have crossed your mind? They aren’t all exclusive to the ‘older’ generation, either.

- **The camera is hard to use:** Take things at your own pace and don’t let anyone else (however well-meaning they may be) rush you into things – everyone learns things differently. Do not worry if your camera proves frustrating to use and does not behave itself, for whatever reason. You may just need to go back a step or two and try again – perseverance is key. Being frustrated can stifle your creativity and make you less keen on continuing with such a rewarding hobby, but don’t give up yet. I have had the experience myself: for a while after acquiring my first digital camera I used to think none of my photographs matched the ones I took with film, but that was because I was more familiar with my old camera’s functions. Gradually, however, I managed to become more aware of my new camera’s features and how they could benefit my photos.

If you keep trying and are still uncomfortable with using your digital camera, perhaps it isn’t right for you: the buttons or the screen at the back could be too small, for example. I thoroughly outline what to look out for when you are buying a digital camera so you can avoid this situation and choose the best one for your needs. You may need to try an alternative model if you received the camera as a gift.

- **I’m not a good photographer:** Everyone has occasions when their photos may not turn out quite right depending on the lighting or the circumstances, but the thing about digital is that you can take as many photos as you like without worrying about the cost of film, as the ‘bad’ photos can be easily erased and minor problems with lighting and composition can be miraculously fixed on your computer. A few common photography tips are provided in this book and there are plenty of online resources, too. Why not ask people for honest and constructive feedback?
- **I will press the wrong button and lose all my photos:** Another worry is that you will lose all your digital photographs in an instant should you press

the wrong button on the camera. This is not necessarily the case, as you will usually have to confirm that you are sure you want to erase the photo, or photos, before you proceed. This book also shows you how to copy your photos on to your computer for safekeeping and backing up. It's easier than you think, and you can still go to a photo lab to get them to copy the images on to a disk if you are really not keen on using your computer. I can't guarantee that the worst won't happen, it's just that it is very unlikely so long as you take precautions. There are ways to try and retrieve photos you may have accidentally erased, which I explain in the book – although these solutions are not always guaranteed, they are worth a try.

- **There is too much technical stuff to learn:** While digital photography has spawned a whole new set of buzzwords, such as megapixel, JPG, red eye, resolution, pixels, memory cards and so on (sorry!), this book guides you through the most common terms and what they mean. There are many manual controls but in practice you won't need to worry about too many of them because modern digital cameras have automatic modes that require minimal input from you. However, those who do want a bit more creative control are catered for in this book, too.
- **It makes me feel stupid:** You are in control of your digital camera. Relax, have fun and try again – that way you can learn from any mistakes.
- **I don't know anything about computers:** You don't actually need to use a computer if you want to get started with digital photography. You can always get a photo lab to print and back up your photographs and, in fact, the first part of the book barely even mentions computers. That said, knowing at least some basic computer concepts will put you at an advantage as you will be able to organise, enhance and share your images. A large part of the book focuses on just that, but there are many consumer-friendly tools out there to make things easy for you.

Your digital camera

Don't worry if you don't have a digital camera yet, as this book explains what to look out for when you are in the shops. Most of the book is targeted towards people who plan to use compact 'point and shoot' cameras rather than digital single-lens reflex (SLR) models with interchangeable lenses, but there is some information about digital SLRs for those who want an 'upgrade'.

The only thing you need to know is how much you are prepared to spend (I provide some money-saving tips, too).

If you already have a digital camera, you'll find plenty of advice on technique and how to make the most of the equipment you've got.

Your computer

Assuming you have a computer and want to use it for digital photography, these are the ideal specifications you'll need (if you don't know what these terms mean, don't worry, I explain them in more detail in Part II):

- A broadband connection.
- Ample hard disk space to store all your photographs (as much as possible).
- At least 1GB of RAM (you *can* get away with 512MB but the more the better for digital photography).
- A DVD drive with the capability to write (burn) data.
- A flat-screen monitor, preferably with a 17-inch screen to help you see your images clearly and crisply.
- Windows Vista or Windows 7 (you can use the older Windows XP operating system but some instructions may be slightly different from the book).
- A printer if you want to print photos at home (please see Chapter 15 for more on choosing a printer, which may include one with scanning functions).



If you are a Mac user, you will still find this book useful as all the principles I discuss are basically the same – you just need to disregard some of the step-by-step instructions that relate to Windows.

This book is your companion: it will help you demystify the jargon and the glossy marketing surrounding digital photographs, so you have the knowledge and, most of all, the confidence to go ahead and experiment with taking photographs and even editing and printing them. Happy snapping!

Summary

- Take things slowly and at your own pace
- Let this book help you choose the right digital camera for your needs and budget
- Practice makes perfect





Brain Training

There may be more than one answer to each of these questions.

1. In digital photography, what is 'red eye'?

- a) Changing the colour of your photograph
- b) When your subject's eyes look red as a result of flash photography
- c) The strain your eyes get when you stare at a computer screen for too long
- d) Another name for your camera lens

2. Why would you want to use a computer for digital photography?

- a) To correct red eye
- b) To fix incorrect colours
- c) To store your photographs
- d) To print your photographs

3. What is the most important thing to consider when buying a digital camera?

- a) How many megapixels it has
- b) How much it costs
- c) How easy it is to use
- d) How small the buttons are

4. What makes a good photograph?

- a) How advanced your digital camera is
- b) How skilful your photography is
- c) It's a matter of personal opinion
- d) How many accessories you use

5. Why shouldn't you worry about erasing or losing all your photos?

- a) There are ways to back them up
- b) You will usually be warned before you erase them
- c) They are unable to be erased
- d) You can always undo the action and retrieve them later

Answers

Q1 – b

Q2 – All are correct

Q3 – c

Q4 – c

Q5 – a and b