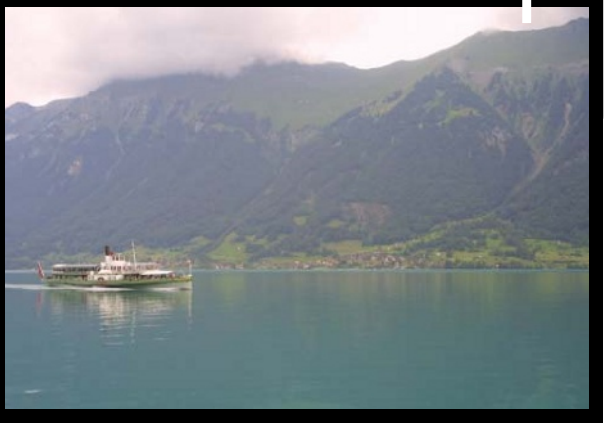
40 Digital Photography Techniques

Chapter 1

The Basics of Taking Photos

I cannot emphasize enough the need to learn the right techniques from the start. In any field of study, using the wrong technique is the same as, if not worse than, not knowing anything at all. So in this chapter, we will look at such basics as preparing for a shoot, taking care of a digital camera, holding a camera and good posture, adjusting image size, using lenses, locking a focus, controlling exposure, and composing an image.



1 Preparing to Shoot

The only way you will take better photos is with practice. To get enough practice, you must always have the camera by your side. The camera has to be kept in top working condition so that you won't miss a practice opportunity or ruin any shots. Before you run out the door with your camera, let's go over some pre-shoot checks in this section.

Gather Your Equipment

First of all, you need to get the battery ready because the digital camera is an energy guzzler. If you are using a rechargeable battery, you will need to charge the battery to full power. This will probably take about two hours. If you are using regular alkaline batteries, take some extras along.

▲ Get in the habit of charging your batteries.

Next, check that the lens is clean and that there is nothing physically wrong with the camera. Also make sure that you have inserted the memory card. People who use a memory card reader often forget that they have left their cards in the reader. They get everything else ready and then head outside with a digital camera that has no memory.

▲ If the lens is dirty, clean it gently.

▲ Make sure that the memory card is in the camera.

▲ Check that the camera straps are not loose.

Finally, check that the camera straps are secure. If not, you run the risk of dropping and breaking your camera.

When you have completed the checks, it is time to pack your equipment (camera, lens cleaning cloth, blower, extra memory card, mini-tripod, and so on) into the camera bag. It is a good idea to include a desiccant so as to absorb excess moisture and keep your equipment dry. Your lens will get moldy and the electronic parts will malfunction if your camera is kept in a humid environment.

▲ Professional photographers keep their equipment in a dry box but for hobbyists, a desiccant will do.

Planning the Shoot

Before you start shooting, think about the photos you are going to take, and be specific. Instead of stopping at “I’m going to take a photo of my family today,” think about how and what kind of family photos you want to take. When you have a plan, you are less likely to miss golden moments.

Most people take more pictures when they use a digital rather than a film camera. Because of this you may end up taking many similar shots, and few meaningful ones, if you don’t have an action plan in mind.

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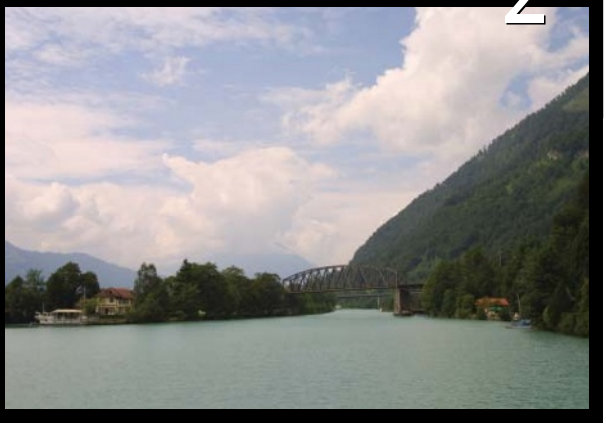


Preventing Camera Shake and Blurring

The secret to non-fuzzy photos lies in your grip and stance. Knowing how to hold and stand with a camera is important in combating even the slightest camera shake, so the first thing I will do in this secion is introduce the correct techniques. After that, we will look at how you can adjust your camera's settings to reduce blur and snap sharper images.

Getting Familiar with the Camera

Most people hold their camera with the left hand and use the right hand to press the shutter and adjust other functions. There are many buttons on the back of the digital camera, but you will probably use only a few of them.

Check your camera's manual to get familiar with the buttons, and remember to press them lightly but firmly.

▲ Familiarize yourself with the buttons and functions on your camera.

▲ Hold the camera steady and press the shutter lightly.

Getting a Good Grip

Place your left palm at the base of the camera. Use your right hand to hold the camera, or the grip, and place your right index finger lightly on the shutter. Exert a stronger grip with your left hand. If you hold the camera with a strong right-hand grip, you may move the camera when you press the shutter button. One reminder, though: always keep your fingers clear of the flash, autofocus window, and lens.

▲ Put one hand through the camera strap's loop and rotate your wrist to wrap it around for a safe grip.

▲ For cameras with grips, use your right hand to hold the grip and your left hand to support the base of the lens lightly.

▲ For cameras without grips, use your left palm to support the camera.

▲ If you are using a large lens, use your left hand to hold the lens.

Practicing the Right Stance

Adopting the right stance can prevent blurring the image, lower the risk of dropping the camera, and reduce fatigue during long photography sessions.

▲ Basic stance—keep both arms close to your body and spread your legs shoulder-width apart for balance.

▲ Horizontal photos—keep both arms close to your body.

▲ Vertical photos—make sure your fingers do not cover the lens or the built-in flash.

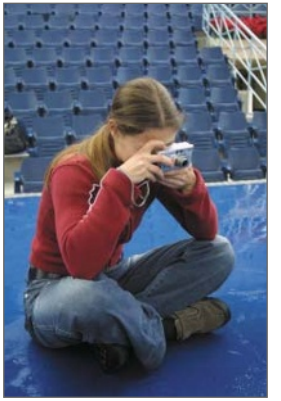
▲ When taking photos of subjects lower than you, squat down to their level and use your knees to support yourself.

Trying Other Positions

If you are sitting down, raise one knee and use it to support your elbow. If you need to get even lower to take the photo, sit cross-legged on the ground and support your elbows on your knees.

▲ Keep your back straight and your arms close to your body.

▲ Raise one knee and use it to support your upper body.



▲ Sit cross-legged to take low shots.

Using the LCD

When you use the LCD, the camera is held away from your body. Because the camera does not have the added support of your body to help stabilize it, blur becomes a bigger issue.

The LCD stance: Use your left hand to support the camera and your right hand to press the shutter. You should not grip the camera too tightly. In addition, keep the camera as close to your body as possible and tuck your elbows in for more support.

When taking vertical shots through the LCD, check that your fingers are not covering the built-in flash. You probably won't make the mistake of covering the lens with your hand because, if you do, you will see it on the LCD. This is one advantage of using the LCD rather than the viewfinder.

▲ Horizontal frame

▲ Vertical shots—make sure your photo is level.

Regulating Your Breathing

Hold your breath as you press the shutter button, as the subtle movements of your breathing can produce blur in your photos. You should also get into the habit of pausing slightly after shooting an image, as moving immediately after releasing the shutter can also blur your pictures.

Using Objects for Support

One of the best ways to prevent camera shake is to use a tripod, but if you find it troublesome to carry one, you can use other objects at the shoot location for support. This technique is useful for preventing blur when you use a shutter speed of up to 1/20 second.

▲ Using other objects as a substitute tripod

▲ Using the wall

Using a tripod

Sometimes there are no objects on location that you can use for support. To be sure that you get sharp images all of the time, use a tripod.

▲ A proper stance and the use of a tripod are essential for preventing motion blur in photos.

Other Ways of Reducing Blur

▶▶▶ Shutter Speed

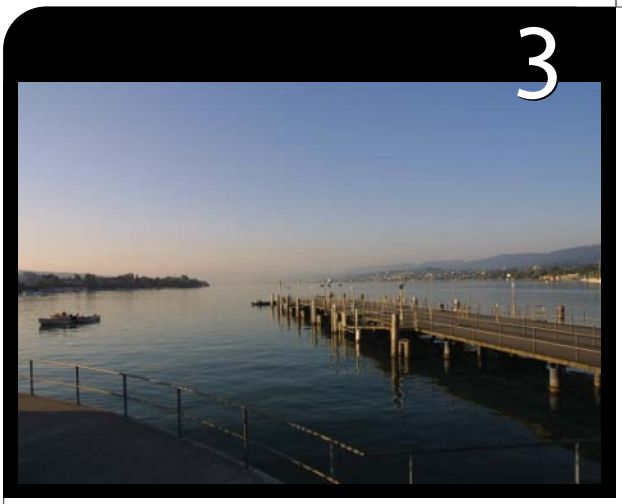
A fast shutter speed will diminish blur and appear to freeze action while a slow shutter speed will capture even the slightest movement as blurred streaks. If you are using an automatic camera, you should note that some of the Scene modes, such as Night Landscape and Fireworks Show, use slow shutter speeds and are more prone to blur. When using such Scene modes, it is best to use a tripod or some form of support, as camera shake becomes more obvious.

▶▶▶ Flash

When synched to work with the shutter, the flash can also reduce blur and appear to freeze action. This option is not available on most automatic cameras.

▶▶▶ Lens Type

When you use a telephoto lens (i.e., to zoom in), a slight camera movement will translate into a huge blur in the image because you are zooming in on a small section of the view. The same amount of camera movement will be less obvious when using a wide-angle lens. If you have a semiautomatic camera, you can set a fast shutter speed when using telephoto lenses to combat blur. With an automatic, you should keep your camera steady using an external support.



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Adjusting Image Size and Quality

Unlike a film camera, a digital camera lets you change the size and resolution of your photos as you take them. Surprisingly, not many users know how to use these features to their advantage. Therefore, in this section, we will take the time to learn about image sizes and resolutions.

Image Size or Resolution

Image size and *image resolution* mean the same thing on a digital camera. An image resolution of 1600 x 1200, for example, means that the image is recorded with 1600 pixels across the width and 1200 pixels down the length. So a photo shot with a bigger image size is recorded with more pixels and will print at a better quality.

▶▶▶ Pixels and Maximum Image Size

The maximum image size you can take with your digital camera depends on the number of pixels your camera has, as outlined in the following table:

Pixels	Maximum Image Size
2.0 million	1600 × 1200
4.0 million	2272 × 1704
6.5 million	3072 × 2048

▲ Resolution: 1600 x 1200; file size: 1119KB

▲ Resolution: 800 x 600; file size: 434KB

▲ Resolution: 400 x 300; file size: 134KB

▶▶▶ When Do You Need High-Resolution Images?

Before taking large or high-resolution images, you should consider the capacity of your memory card as these images take up more memory and limit the number of photos you can take. However, there are some instances when you should take high-resolution images. Here are some of them:

- If you need to develop photos that are 8 x 10 or larger.
- If you need to take a close-up but your camera's zoom cannot work at that distance. In such a scenario, you can shoot a high-resolution image, use the crop tool in a graphics program to crop it to size, and blow it up to look like a close-up.

▶▶▶ When Can You Take Low-Resolution Images?

Generally, it is a much better idea to take images at high resolutions and scale them down later than to take low-resolution shots up front. But if quality is not a major concern and quantity is, then these are some situations when you may wish to use low resolution:

- If you have limited memory, as low-resolution images require less memory.
- If you are taking photos for the Internet, you can take images at 800 × 600 pixels or less. Since you need fast downloading speed, you should keep image resolution small.

Using the Continuous Function

When you take continuous shots using the Continuous function, the images are stored temporarily in the camera's buffer memory, which is small in most popular digital camera brands. Therefore, only low-resolution images are taken with the Continuous function.

Image Quality

Images are compressed as they are saved on the memory card in order to reduce the memory they use. The file format used is JPEG, which uses a lossy compression method as I mentioned before. Most cameras usually offer two (Basic or Fine) or three (Normal, Fine, or Super Fine) different levels of image quality. When you set a high image quality (Super Fine), the camera will use a low rate of compression. On the other hand, a high rate of compression creates a low image quality (Basic).

▲ Image resolution: 1600 × 1200; image quality: Normal

▲ Image resolution: 1600 × 1200; image quality: Fine

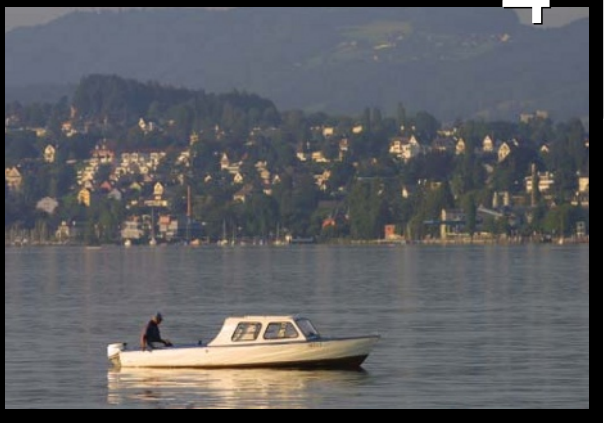
▲ Image resolution: 1600 × 1200; image quality: Super Fine

Changing Image Size and Quality

In most cameras, you press the Menu button to change the image size and quality. The figures on the right show you how to change the image size and set the image quality to Super Fine. As every camera model is different, the best thing to do is to refer to the manual.

▲ This camera offers four different image sizes to choose from.

▲ This camera has three levels of image quality.



4 Locking a Focus

A camera's autofocus (AF) system works by automatically focusing on the object in the center of the viewfinder. So if you press the shutter-release button while your subject is positioned off-center, your subject will be out of focus, as the camera is automatically set to focus and expose for the object in the center. To focus and expose an off-center subject correctly, you will need to use Focus Lock—a system for telling the camera where to focus.

Using Focus Lock

First, position the subject in the center of your viewfinder. Next, press the shutter-release button halfway to lock the focus at the distance where the subject is. As you press the button, you will hear a click or see the focus indicator (most likely a green dot) light up on the LCD.

After that, reposition the subject so that it is off-center on your LCD. Check that neither you nor your subject move from your original position as you recompose the shot. Finally, press the shutter all the way down to take the picture. By locking the focus first, your subject will be in focus even though it is not centered. As you won't be taking only subject-centered images, practice this technique so that you can compose freely while still keeping your subject in focus.

▲ Press the shutter-release button halfway to lock the focus, and keep your finger in this position.

▲ Photo taken without using Focus Lock.

▲ Position the subject in the center and press the shutter-release button halfway to focus on the subject.

▲ Recompose the shot and press the shutter-release button all the way down to take the photo.

Adjusting Exposure Using Focus Lock

When you lock the focus on a subject, the camera is also set to expose properly for it. In other words, if you lock the focus on a very bright subject, the camera will underexpose the shot in order to expose the subject correctly. The effect of doing this is to make the entire photo appear slightly darker. Conversely, if you lock the focus on a very dark subject, the camera will overexpose the shot and this will make the photo appear slightly brighter.

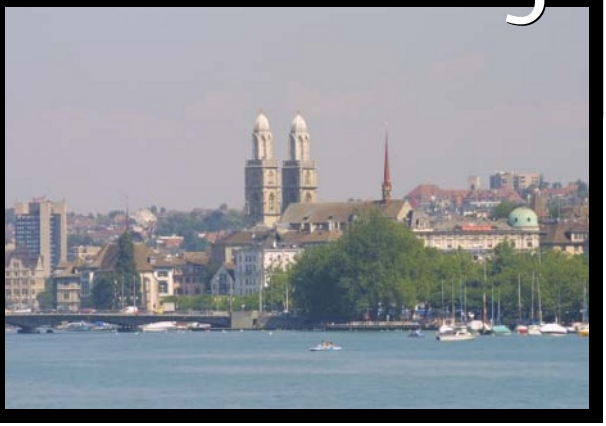
▲ Underexposing the photo by locking the focus on the brightest area

▲ Overexposing the photo by locking the focus on the darkest area

▲ Exposing the picture correctly by locking the focus on a suitable area

▶ Using the Focus Lock function, you can choose which subject to focus on.

5 Using Lenses



The earliest camera was the pinhole camera, which was just a black box with a pin-sized hole in one of its sides. Pinhole cameras did not use lenses to help them focus light rays, so the images produced were rather blurry. But ever since lenses were incorporated into camera design, things have been very different. Today, there are countless types of lenses that can be built into digital compacts or attached to SLRs.

About the Lens

The term *lens* refers to a transparent substance, usually glass, used in optical devices to change the convergence of light rays. In photography, these pieces are known as lens elements. *Lens* can refer to a single lens element or groups of these elements. Inside a lens, you will also find an iris diaphragm that controls the amount of light entering the camera.

▶▶▶ Aperture

As you have read in the introduction, the aperture is the size of the opening created by the iris diaphragm.

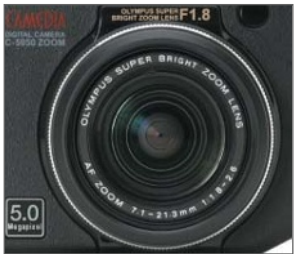
When you open up the aperture, you let in more light. The aperture of a lens is measured on a scale of *f*-stops or *f*-numbers that are fractions of the focal length of the lens. A large aperture would have a small *f*-number, while a small aperture would have a large *f*-number.

Understanding the Terminology of Lenses: An Example

Olympus Super Bright Zoom Lens Olympus uses the term *Super Bright* to describe lenses with a large maximum aperture.

AF Zoom The camera's zoom lens is capable of autofocusing.

7.1–21.3mm These numbers represent the focal length range of the lens. As we learned in the preceding pages, this is equivalent to a focal length range of 35 – 105mm on a film camera. Note that the maximum focal length of 21.3mm is three times that of the minimum focal length of 7.1mm. So another way of describing the focal length range of a camera like this one is to say that it has a 3x optical zoom.



▲ Olympus C-5050 lens

1:1.8–2.6 These numbers indicate the range in aperture size. An aperture size of *f*/1.8 is considered very large for popular digital cameras. For most of us, an aperture of *f*/2.8 or smaller is good enough.

Zooming Effect

If you zoom while using a slow shutter speed, you can create a zooming effect, as shown below. First, set a slow shutter speed. When the shutter is open, zoom into a target while keeping your camera steady.


▲ The zooming effect

tip You can achieve the same effect by using the Night Landscape Scene mode, which uses a slow shutter speed.

▶▶▶ Angle of View

The amount of a scene that can be recorded by a lens is called the angle of view. The angle of view depends on the focal length of the lens. A wide-angle lens, as the name suggests, has a wide angle of view, meaning that it can record much of the scene before it. A telephoto lens, on the other hand, has a narrow angle of view and is used for zooming in on subjects at a distance.

In general, lenses with a focal length between 14mm and 50mm (film camera equivalent) are considered wide-angle lenses. Those with focal lengths around 50mm are standard lenses, while lenses longer than 50mm are telephoto lenses. If you have a 3X zoom lens with a focal length of 35mm–105mm, it is comparable to having a wide-angle (35mm) lens, a standard (50mm) lens, and a telephoto (105mm) lens at the same time.

The following photos show the same scene shot with different length lenses. Observe how the focal length affects how small or large the subject appears.

▲ Focal length: 30mm

▲ Focal length: 50mm

▲ Focal length: 100mm

▶▶▶ Perspective

Changing the focal length not only changes how much of the scene you capture, it also changes the perspective. Your subject can seem nearer or farther away from the other subjects depending on the lens you use. When you use a telephoto lens, the perspective is compressed and your subject will appear closer to the background. In contrast, your subject will appear to be farther away from the background if you use a wide-angle lens.

▶▶▶ Depth of Field

Depth of field, also known as depth of focus, is the range of distance in which you can keep the scene sharply focused. When describing depth of field, we say it is either deep or shallow.

In the photo on the right, both the objects and the background are brought into focus so, we say that it has a deep depth of field. In the other photo, the middle object is in focus while everyhing else is blurred, so this photo is said to have a shallow depth of field.

▲ Shallow depth of field

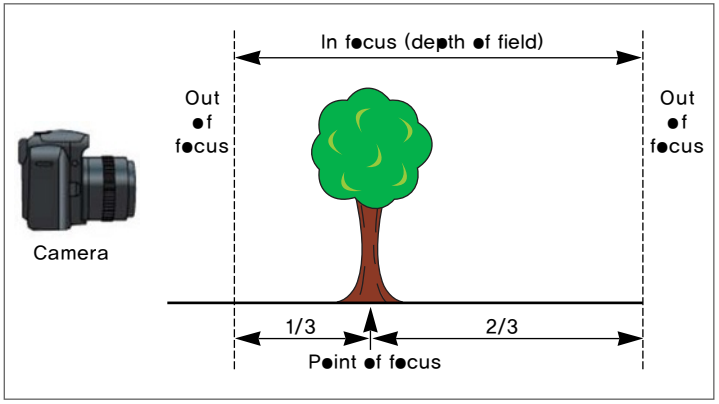
▲ Deep depth of field

Changing the Depth of Field

You can change the depth of field by adjusting the aperture. A large aperture creates a shallow depth of field, while a small aperture creates a deeper depth of field. The results will appear quite different. This is covered in greater detail later in the chapter.

Another way of changing the depth of field is to change the lens. You may have noticed that you get a shallow depth of field when you are close to your subject and a deeper depth of field when you are farther away. In the same way, telephoto lenses (or maximum zoom on your camera), with their long focal length, have a shallow depth of field while wide-angle lenses, with their short focal length, have a deeper depth of field.

In addition, you need to remember that the range of focus in front of and behind a point of focus is unequal. About 1/3 of your depth of field is in front of your point of focus while 2/3 of it is behind.

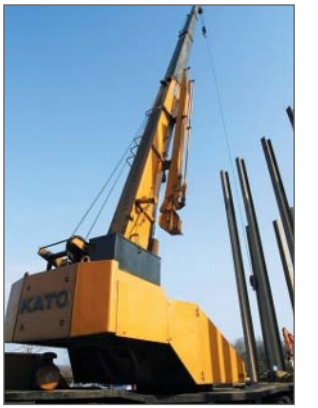


Choosing Between Wide-Angle and Telephoto Lenses

▶▶▶ Wide-Angle Lens (Zoom-Out)

▲ A wide-angle lens is great for shooting scenery.

▶ Shooting objects or buildings with a wide-angle lens exaggerates perspective and makes them look more majestic.

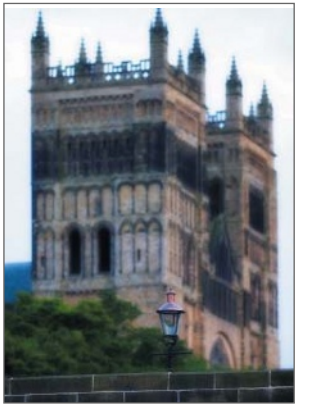


▶ A deep depth of field that allows both the subject and the background to remain in focus

▶▶▶ Telephoto Lens (Zoom-In)

▶ A telephoto lens is a must for taking photos of subjects that you can't approach.

▲ A shallow depth of field gives emphasis to the subject by bringing it into focus against a blurry background.



▶ A telephoto lens compresses perspective and makes subjects, such as landmarks in the distance, appear closer then they really are.

▶ It helps to remember that in addition to the background, a telephoto lens will also blur out the foreground elements. In this shot, the cage wires in the foreground are blurred out.

▶ If you don't zoom in enough, the cage wires become more obvious.

6 Controlling Exposure

In this section, you will learn to adjust the exposure using automatic cameras with the Exposure Compensation feature and using semiautomatic cameras with the Shutter Priority or Aperture Priority mode. Even if you can't adjust the aperture or shutter speed on your camera, this chapter will help you understand how your camera arrives at the automatic settings and what happens in the Scene modes that are available on most cameras.

What Is Exposure?

Exposure refers to the total amount of light that hits the CCD on a digital camera or the film on a traditional camera. An image is said to be overexposed when the CCD receives too much light and underexposed when it receives too little. Changing the aperture or shutter speed will alter the exposure, but these two methods produce slightly different results.

Adjusting Exposure with Exposure Compensation

Also known as EV (exposure value) adjustment, this feature lets you modify the automatic exposure set by the camera up or down a few levels. A value of 0 represents the exposure suggested by the camera. Select the + values (for example, +0.3, +0.7) to increase the exposure and make the image brighter and the – values (for example, –0.3, –0.7) to decrease the exposure and darken the image.

▶ The Exposure Compensation menu

▲ Original exposure at 0

▲ Correct exposure at −0.3

▲ Underexposed at −0.7

Adjusting Exposure with ISO

Another way of adjusting the exposure on a consumer camera is to change the sensitivity of the CCD to light. Check if your camera supports manual ISO adjustment. If it does, increase the ISO when shooting in low-light conditions so that the image needs less light to be properly exposed. If it doesn't, use additional light sources (candles, flashlight, for example) to brighten up the location. Conversely, use a low ISO, turn off the lights, or provide some shade when shooting in a very bright location.

Adjusting Exposure with Aperture

As you know by now, an aperture is measured on a scale of *f*-stops or *f*-numbers, and the smaller the *f*-number, the bigger the aperture. The stop numbers are *f*/1.0, *f*/1.4, *f*/2, *f*/2.8, *f*/4, *f*/5.6, and so on. The interval between each stop is known as one stop.

The size of the aperture or the amount of light passing through it doubles every time we stop up (use a smaller *f*-number). Conversely, it reduces by half as we stop down (use a larger *f*-number). At an aperture of *f*/4, for example, the amount of light passing through the lens is half of *f*/2.8 but twice as much as *f*/5.6. Lenses with a big maximum aperture are expensive. Most consumer lens apertures may not open wide enough to work well in poorly lit areas.

▲ Underexposed at *f*/5.6: amount of light halved

▲ Correct exposure at *f*/4

▲ Overexposed at *f*/2.8: amount of light doubled

When to Use Aperture Priority Mode

When adjusting exposure in the Aperture Priority mode, you should note that opening up the aperture has the effect of making the depth of field in the image more shallow, causing a loss of detail in the image. The reverse is true when closing the aperture.

▶▶▶ Shallow Depth of Field

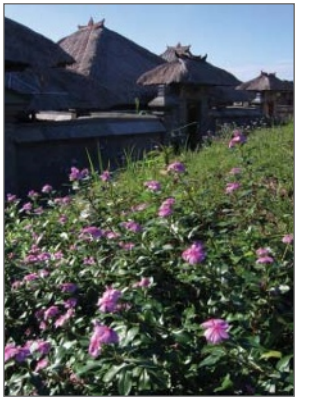
To emphasize a subject by bringing it into focus while blurring the background, set the camera to Aperture Priority mode and open up the aperture to create a shallow depth of field. You can get a similar effect by selecting the Portrait mode on an automatic camera.

▲ f/1.8 at 1/250 second

▶▶▶ Deep Depth of Field

To make sure that the entire image is sharply focused (especially for scenic shots), use a small aperture to create a deep depth of field. When you use a small aperture, you have to use a slow shutter speed in order to expose the image adequately. The camera automatically adjusts these settings if you select the Landscape mode. A slow shutter speed will make the camera sensitive to movement, so the use of a tripod is recommended.

At times, you can't use a slow shutter speed but you need to have a large depth of field. For instance, you may be taking a shot of people standing at various distances from the camera who can't keep still. In such cases, you can still use a small aperture with a normal shutter speed, but you have to take the shot on a very bright day or environment.

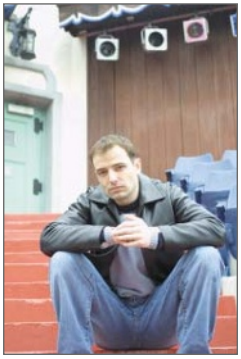


▲ f/8 at 1/50 second

Adjusting Exposure with Shutter Speed

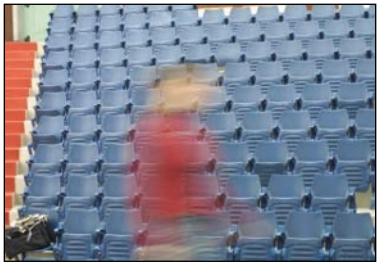
The shutter controls the length of time that light enters the camera. A fast shutter speed shortens the exposure time, reducing the total amount of light the CCD receives. On the other hand, a slow shutter speed increases the amount of light entering and is therefore ideal for low-light photography. The range of shutter speeds available is very wide. The more commonly used range is from 2 seconds to 1/500 second. Like aperture intervals, one shutter speed interval is equal to 1 stop. Similarly, a shutter speed of 1 second, for example, is twice as slow as a shutter speed of 1/2 second and lets in double the amount of light.

▲ Correct exposure at a shutter speed of 1/60 second



▲ Overexposed at a shutter speed of 1/30 second: amount of light doubled

▲ Underexposed at a shutter speed of 1/125 second: amount of light halved



▲ Shot at a shutter speed of 1/2 second

▲ Shot at a shutter speed of 1/30 second

▲ Shot at a shutter speed of 1/125 second

When to Use Shutter Priority Mode

Other than its effect on exposure, shutter speed has a tremendous impact on how movement is captured. A fast shutter speed can freeze a subject in motion, which is why you should use fast shutter speeds at sporting events. Using a slow shutter speed captures the motion of moving objects as light trails.

▶▶▶ Fast Shutter Speeds

Set the camera to Shutter Priority mode and use a fast shutter speed to freeze a subject in motion. If you have an automatic camera, you can switch to the Sports mode that automatically sets faster shutter speeds.

As shutter speed increases, more light is needed to properly expose the image, so sunny days and well-lit surroundings, together with high ISO (light sensitivity) settings, are best for such shots.

▶ Shutter speed: 1/8 second

▶▶▶ Slow Shutter Speeds

Try a slow shutter speed to capture the motion streaks of vehicles at night. Remember to use a tripod to prevent camera shake. On an automatic camera, the Night Landscape or Fireworks Show mode produce similar results. While in these modes, the camera uses a slow shutter speed, focuses at infinity, and turns off the flash.

When you use a slow shutter speed, the CCD receives a lot of light, so you should take these shots at night or in dimly lit surroundings to prevent overexposure.

▶ Shutter speed: 30 seconds

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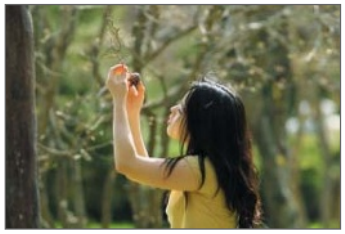
Composing a Shot

Composition, in both photography and art, refers to the way in which the elements that make up the work are arranged. While there are clear, technical instructions on how to use a camera, the interpretation of what makes a good composition is subjective. But in spite of the subject's non-specific nature, there are some general guides, and dos and don'ts, that will help you in composing a shot.

Subject Placement

▶▶▶ Place the Subject in the Right Spot

The subject need not be in the center of your photos all of the time. The subject can be in the center, but it can also be off-center for a completely different effect.



tip A well-composed image is one that complements the photographer's vision or ideas. For example, if your aim is to portray your subject in a favorable light, the composition should enhance your subject's characteristics.

▶▶▶ Avoid Interference

A common mistake made by beginners is focusing on getting the subject right but forgetting everything else. Don't fall into that trap. Remember that in order to create a good composition, all elements in the photo must mix well. Before you press the shutter button, check that surrounding objects do not interfere with your main subject. This can take the form of a lamp post or a tree branch sticking out of your subject's head, as shown here.

▲ In the original shot, the railing was interfering with the man, who is the main subject. The photo looks much better when the model moves away from the railing.

▶▶▶ Rule of Thirds

Essentially, the Rule of Thirds is about dividing the frame into thirds horizontally and vertically with two vertical and two horizontal lines. As the rule goes, you will get a pleasing composition if you place your subject along the lines or the intersections of the lines. It is widely acknowledged among photographers that this "rule" is not really a rule; it's more like a guide. In some cases, it may be better to break this rule.

▶ Using the Rule of Thirds in this shot produced a pleasing composition.

Before taking a photo, think of how to organize your subjects in order to communicate your theme, and try to visualize the results. While composing an image, most photographers go through the process of repeatedly adding and removing elements before they finally settle on a particular composition. During this process, a photographer has to keep reviewing his vision of the final image. With practice, a photographer will be able to match his vision with reality more closely. Many well-composed shots, especially indoor ones, are not accidental; they were pre-visualized and shot as planned.

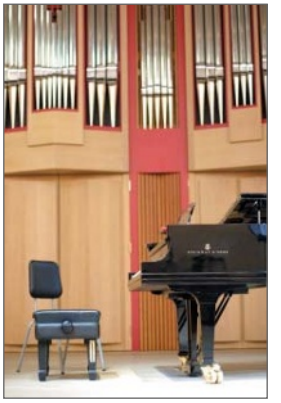
▲ You need to develop a "camera's eye" for seeing the world in order to pick out photo opportunities.

▲ The LCD on digital cameras makes it easier to compose a shot.

Horizontal or Vertical?

You can make the same photo look completely different simply by changing the orientation layout, for example horizontal or vertical. The key is in choosing a layout that best highlights the subject's features and characteristics. Horizontal shots, in general, can give a sense of stability to the photo while vertical shots are normally used to shoot tall buildings to give emphasis to height.

▶ A horizontal shot makes the forest look dense and enclosed while a vertical shot includes less of the forest and more of the path and the sky, making the scene look more open and the perspective a little deeper.



▶ The choice between a vertical and horizontal orientation here depends on whether the emphasis is on the chamber pipes or the grand piano.

Filling Up the Frame

A common mistake is to take the shot too far away from the subject. Try moving one step closer to your subject to give it more emphasis vis-à-vis the background. This will help to focus the viewer's attention on the characteristics and features of the subject. This technique will also remove a cluttered or dull background from the photo.

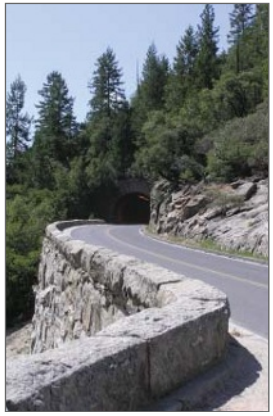
▲ From a long way off, the subject looks insignificant while the background looks featureless. Moving closer captures more of the detail in the subject and the background.

Instead of thinking only about adding elements to a scene, you should look at removing unnecessary objects to keep the main point of interest on the subject. You can do this by physically removing the unwanted elements, moving closer, or shooting from a different point of view.

▲ Get closer to get more of the subject and less of the distracting background.

Leading Lines

The environment around us is composed of natural lines—the horizon, winding paths, straight roads, etc. By exploiting the existing lines in a scene, we can move the viewer's gaze across or deeper into the photo, making it a more dynamic and engaging work. These lines—known as leading lines—are often used to direct the point of interest to the main subject.



▲ Use leading lines to guide your viewer's gaze into the photo.

Experiment with taking a photo from way above or way below for a fresh point of view that will make your composition stand out from the rest. Even a photo of ordinary subjects can look extraordinary if you shoot it at an interesting angle.

▲ A shot of the other side of the gate taken from the top

▲ A front shot of a gate

Note

We've taken a look at some common compositions, but this does not mean that you should force all of your photos to fit into one of these forms. When composing a shot, it is more important that you evaluate the scene, the mood, and the moment before your eyes and explore compositions that will deliver the theme you have in mind.

In other words, how photos are composed is completely up to you. Instead of restricting your shots to the compositions we discussed in this section, use them as a foundation for creating your own work.

For beginners, we recommend that you practice composing shots using inanimate objects because it will help you to develop a photographer's eye for good subject placement.

▶ Although the the subjects are right in the center and not 1/3 from the edge as spelled out in the Rule of Thirds, the compositions are still pleasing in their simplicity and balance.

Chapter 1 | Photo Basics

- Wrap the wrist strap around your wrist and get a good grip on the camera.
- Check that your fingers are not covering the lens or built-in flash.
- Adopt a steady posture, using other objects or a tripod for support if necessary.
- Use Focus Lock to focus on a subject that is not in the center of your viewfinder,
- Adjust the exposure using the Exposure Compensation feature if the image is too dark or too bright.
- Adjust the exposure by changing the aperture or shutter speed if you have a semiautomatic camera.
- Use a large aperture (small *f*-number) to blur the background.
- Use a small aperture (large *f*-number) to keep the entire image focused.
- Use a fast shutter speed to freeze action.
- Use a slow shutter speed to create motion streaks.
- Do not position your subject in the center all of the time.
- Check that surrounding objects do not interfere with your subject.
- Try using the Rule of Thirds.
- Fill up the frame with your subject.
- Look for leading lines in the scene.