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The Secrets of Digital Photography

Lesson One : Introduction to Photography

INTRODUCTION

Welcome to your very first instalment of *The Secrets of Digital Photography*, and congratulations on taking the first and most important step towards capturing high-impact, stunning images with your camera that take others years of practice to accomplish. This open-ended course is designed specifically to introduce you to every area of photography and provide you with the latest tips, tricks, and techniques that the pros use to obtain their outstanding images. Throughout this course we will cover some foundational course work as well as introduce you to some exciting areas of photography, such as:

- Landscapes – Take beautiful images every time!
- Lighting – Both outdoor and indoor – we cover it all.
- Portraits – How to capture rare moments instead of repetitive snapshots.
- Night Photography – Never take another blurry photo again!
- Photo Enhancement – Simple, easy-to-learn tricks that only the pros know about!

....and **so** much more!

Each lesson will introduce you to a new subject and will encourage you to go out and practice what you have learned with exercises for each section of the lesson. This course may ask you to perform anything from simple research to performing an involved photo shoot; whatever is necessary to ensure that you understand the new information completely.

Since photography is such a “hands-on” hobby, simply reading what to do or how to do it is not going to make you actually *get* it.

This is why – on top of the numerous exercises in each lesson – there will be a **challenge** for you to complete at the end, which will usually involve you taking into practice all the things learned in each lesson.

These challenges are vital in your venture into photography: this isn't a hobby where book-reading will get you far in actually capturing those beautiful images you want.

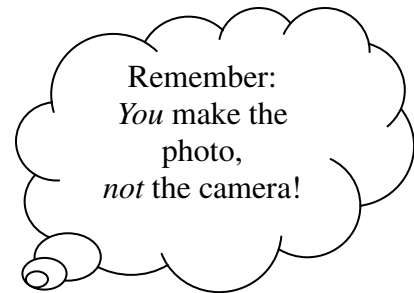
Now Watch a Video

How to take better photos with your compact camera
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RS2jdUQLwbM>

1. WHAT TO EXPECT

During your study, you will develop into a keen photographer who knows that the origins of good photos go *well* beyond having the best gear or taking the latest seminars. This course will provide you with the tools and techniques used to make stunning photographs by teaching you key concepts in:

- ✓ Composition
- ✓ Lighting
- ✓ In-camera techniques
- ✓ Manipulating your environment
- ✓ Staging your models
- ✓ Photo editing



...just to name a few.

A large part of obtaining beautiful photos is your ability to *continue* with your work and the learning process after lessons.

You'll never be able to grow as a photographer – and thus keep producing amazing photos – if you are not steadfast with it. This is why *The Secrets of Digital Photography* is a course set apart from the rest – the weekly lessons are worth so much more to you instead of a one-time workshop or book that you purchase.

Here's a small sample of photographic subjects that we'll be covering :

- ◆ Flowers
- ◆ Ghosts (*simulated – not actual!*)
- ◆ Children
- ◆ Seaside Landscapes
- ◆ Self-Portraits

- ◆ Pets
- ◆ Sports
- ◆ Fireworks
- ◆ Weddings

...and *many* more where that came from!

This course will continually push the boundaries of you and your camera, developing you into someone who has a keen eye for detail and can take professional-quality photographs while circumventing the formal training and expensive gear. You don't have to spend thousands of pounds to improve your photography since the most profound changes comes from simple compositional and non-technical tips that anyone can apply to their images.

OK, you're keen to get started, so let's begin with some important foundations that you can use to build your photographic future on!

2. CHOOSE THE RIGHT VANTAGE POINT

The camera and lens are not the only tools you use to frame your photo; the **vantage point** you choose to take your photo from can impact how powerful your image will be. A photo of your pet taken from your regular viewpoint while standing could produce a nice photo, but crouching down to the eye level of your pet to capture a photo will add drama as well as a more intimate perspective.

Another example would be to take a photo of a small flower while looking down, then taking another photo of that same flower while laying on the ground. The more powerful image will be the one that accents the height of the flower rather than dwarfing it by looking downwards, as seen in Figure 1.1.

Now Watch a Video

Six quick digital photography tips

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JwT5WzsaXv0&list=PLBE338967F8DB7F2A>

FIGURE 1.1



Notice how the flower looks much larger than it really is (it is only about 10mm).

By getting so close, you throw the background out of focus, which concentrates the eye on what you want the viewer to see.

Where you stand affects how your photo looks, and can create emotions. If you take a portrait of a successful entrepreneur, it would add to the impression of power if you take the photo from a low, more submissive vantage point which will make the subject appear taller. This will convey an air of respect and admiration.

But if you take the photo from above or even at eye-level, it will lose this dramatic perspective.

EXERCISE

For your first exercise, you need to look through your camera at a subject – anything you choose – and explore at least five different perspectives to see how differently it appears at new angles.

Explore how your subject looks from looking up, down, to the side, far away and up close.

3. GET YOUR BACKGROUND RIGHT

The subject of your photo should not be your only concern. The importance of the role your background and environment plays in your image is often overlooked, especially in portrait photography.

Background imagery can:

- Either *compliment* or *contrast* with your subject.
- Add interesting colours or shapes to your photo.
- Help tell a story about where the photograph is taken or who is in the photo.
- Convey a certain emotion or feeling.

In fact, sometimes background imagery is more profound than your actual subject, and can also assist you in conveying a certain feeling or point.

For example, if you were taking a photo of a coffee shop owner, taking her photo against a white wall for an editorial would be very boring and does not give any insight about the subject or what she does.

However, a photo of her working a coffee bean grinder or perhaps of her standing in front of a cappuccino machine would convey to the audience who she is before even reading the adjoining article (Figure 1.2).

FIGURE 1.2

The coffee machine helps tell us what this person does.



The shop in the background tells the viewer that this is a coffee shop and that she must work here.

Always take backgrounds into consideration when you're framing your shot since certain colours or depths of field can either compliment or contrast against your subject.

Some photographers enjoy a strong contrast, such as a soft floral arrangement against a high-contrast urban graffiti wall. The opposing textures and contrasting subject matter offers a strong and powerful image that makes a bold statement (Figure 1.3).

NOW WATCH A VIDEO

How to see a photograph and mentally frame it as you shoot

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Oy9Y5OWj_Jc

FIGURE 1.3

The city skyline is blurred so that more focus is on the sparrow.



The background is in direct contrast to the foreground, which gives the image more overall interest.

EXERCISE

*Go outside with your camera and find an object (for example, a tree or a person) and take a few photos with a background that **compliments** your subject.*

This compliment could be either:

- 1. the specific type of background (for example, a tree would benefit from a floral background) or*
- 2. the colour/shape of your background*

*Spend some time on this exercise as it's a very important concept to grasp – at **least** an hour.*

4. EXPERIMENT WITH YOUR PHOTOGRAPHS

While every photographer benefits from following the “cardinal rules” of photography, be aware that the most profound and moving images stem from the photographer's willingness to experiment with

their camera.

There is no such thing as a silly method when it comes to photography, only techniques that will either be beneficial to your craft or utterly useless – and even then, this only applies to *you*, not to other photographers.

What you may find to be unsuccessful is something another photographer can't live without – one photographer's rubbish is a treasure to another.

Having a camera makes you no more a photographer than having a hammer and some nails makes you a carpenter.

- Claude Adams

Experimentation is the key to developing your own signature sense of style that expresses who you are. Discovering new ways to capture images is more than just an artistic representation. However, by wanting to continually learn photographic techniques, you'll discover innovative ways with your camera that may even work better for you than anything you read in these lessons.

All the information detailed in even the most advanced photography workshops and guides is just compiled techniques that went through the trial-and-error of many photographers. The amount of information you can learn about this craft is infinite, which is something you should be *very* excited about!

EXERCISE

*You need to start keeping a photography journal. Since we're just beginning the course, this is the best time as you can look back and read how you grow as a photographer. Don't worry – We're not asking you for a tightly-organised and categorised journal, but one that represents your innovative thoughts and processes. Whenever (and we mean **whenever**) you have a new idea, concept, technique, or even a question – write it down and go back to it often. It's a great way to keep track of both your thoughts and your progress.*

NOW WATCH A VIDEO

Some tips for getting the right composition
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7XSsV0ZddeU>

5. MAKE TIME FOR YOUR PHOTOGRAPHY

Only amateurs assume that photography is as easy as 1-2-3. They think you can just pick up a camera at any time and snap away to get the most amazing shots.

While that *may* happen once in a full moon, 99% of the shots you get will be the product of careful planning and well-spent time on setting up your camera and finding your subjects. You can plan ahead easily by doing some or all of the following:

- ✓ **Take photos when you have ample time** – If you work during the day, plan to shoot at night or on the weekends and make sure to bring along the proper gear (we will go over that in the coming lessons). Do you have a long lunch break? Bring along your camera and do some street photography at outside cafe, or a restaurant with a nice window view of a busy sidewalk. There is never a *bad* time for photography – you just need to figure out when you have time and which areas of photography are appropriate for you.
- ✓ **Start thinking like a photographer** – This means you should always be thinking about photography when you are mindlessly driving or walking around. Look at a subject and say to yourself “How would I photograph that? Which light would be better – morning or evening? How would I get to that location – do I need to hike?” - and so on. Thinking of these things *ahead* of time will not only give you inspiring ideas, but eliminate time spent planning your trip since you already worked out the details beforehand.
- ✓ **Plan ahead** – If you have an idea for a photo shoot – whether it be your brother’s birthday party or a trip to the mountains for some skiing shots – do *not* leave the planning to the last minute, or you will surely find yourself in a bind.

For example, if you want to capture some images of squirrels in the park, do a bit of research and see what time they are usually out the most, and what kind of food they like that may make them approach you for a photo.

Most amateurs assume that not a lot of time is needed to capture a great photo, but typically it could take anywhere from one hour to the entire *day* to get the shot you want. When this is taken into consideration, anything that you can plan ahead is less time wasted on unnecessary things and more time on what you are there for – your photography!

EXERCISE

When you’ve finished reading this lesson and know what you would like to do for the challenge below, take the next hour and plan your photo shoot - deciding on the location, subject, and time of day.

Decide on important things like what you need to bring along (if you're going on a hike, for example) and the transport needed to your location. Don't just spontaneously decide to execute your photo shoot; decide on a specific day, time, and location beforehand. This is a great habit to develop, especially for photography.

CHALLENGE ONE

CAPTURE A 'TRAVEL' SHOT

For your first challenge, we want you take any photograph that suggest 'travel'. This could be a street scene from your local tourist destination or landmark.

Take at least 15-30 images of the same subject, but take care to explore different:

- Vantage points
- Perspectives

and....

- Background imagery

Once you've selected your best image, write up a short description detailing how you approached this photo and what elements you found to be specifically successful.

For example, if you took a photo of a local landmark, describe what kind of vantage point you used and why you think it added to the overall impact of the photo. There are no wrong answers to a photo description, so be as detailed as you want to be.

COMING UP IN THE NEXT LESSON

1. How natural lighting can affect your photos.
2. What is the "golden hour"?
3. Why overcast days are better than sunny days for portraits