Basics of Photography

Courtesy of Phillips Studio L Photography

If you enjoy taking digital pictures, you are not alone. The world of photography is wide open to anyone with a slight creative talent and a relatively inexpensive digital camera. Check out bookstore shelves and you will find many books devoted to teaching you the basics of digital photography and providing insight into camera specifications and prices. Before you dive into photography as a hobby, or even as a profession, you should first understand a few photography basics that actually apply to film, as well as digital, cameras. Keep the following simple tips in mind when taking pictures:

Compose with Care

Focus on Your Subject

Watch the Weather

Keep it Simple

Be Bold

First things first. You have to admit there is no need for learning about photography unless you have the necessary equipment. The basic tool of photography is, of course, the camera. Like all hobbyists and artists, you should be very familiar with your tools before using them. You will primarily be concerned with the body of the camera and with the lens.

Camera Body

The camera body is what you might refer to as the boxy part of a camera. It contains the controls that comprise the camera. The lens is either built in to the body, or it attaches to the body. If the camera is a film-based unit, the body holds the film. In addition, the body houses a batter that powers the shutter, flash, light meter, and other controls. You will usually find rings to connect a strap to the camera body for ease of carrying.

Lens

The job of the lens is to focus light into the body (and onto the film, in the case of a film-based camera). Some cameras accommodate interchangeable lens, so that you can connect a lens that is appropriate for your subject, action, and lighting. You might enjoy a wide-angle lens for those panoramic views, or maybe a telephoto lens is necessary to get clear shots of far-away objects. Lens prices can vary, but be prepared to shell out a good deal of money if you are working with a single-lens reflex camera. Of course, many consumer models are not equipped to change lens styles, so you will be content with internal controls that let you zoom in or out on subjects.

Composition

Now that you have a basic understanding of camera equipment, you should consider how to become a better photographer. A snapshot is typically just that—a quickly captured image that might by accidentally be good. You should plan your photos so that you do not just take snapshots. Composition refers to the way an image is put together. The most beautiful subject in the world will not necessarily make the best image. You have to know how to get that image on film by studying a few rules of composition.

Rule of Thirds

Imagine a tic-tac-toe board being drawn across a subject that you are photographing. The board is broken into nine equal squares. The four points where those lines intersect are the strongest docal points. Now, imagine the grid placement as you shoot. A picture is usually best composed when the subject is in one third of the grid, and not right in the center. If an object is alone in the image, it is strongest along the left-hand line; that is because we read from left to right, so the eye is trained to move in that direction.

Depth of Field

Depth of Field is how much of the image is in focus before and beyond the focus point. Think about a picture you have seen in which the subject is in focus, but the background is blurred significantly. In that case, the depth of field is low. On the other hand, an image in which the subject is clear, as is the background, has greater depth of field. Landscapes generally have a large depth of field, as you want the entire view to be in focus. However, portraits often are better suited in a small depth of field, where the background is blurred to reduce distractions from the main subject.

Depth of field is determined by several factors:

Aperture/F-Stop

Lens

Subject Distance

Point of View

The position from which the camera sees the scene is the point of view. Are you looking down or up at a subject? How close are you to the subject? Is there any distraction between you and the subject? Thinking about how your viewer will see the photo will help you choose the best point of view. Sometimes the point of view depends pretty completely on the subject. Seldom is it best to take photos of animals when you are looking up at them. That is especially true of large animals, such as horses.

Juxtaposition

Point of view is an important consideration. No matter what the point of view, though, you can sometimes change a ho-hum photo into a stunning masterpiece through juxtaposition. Juxtaposition is taking a photo from an unexpected angle. For example, an eye-level photo of a bird is much more interesting than looking up into a tree to take the same bird’s photo.

Becoming the Subject

Think about becoming the subject of an action photo. For example, instead of taking a photo of a golfer making a putt, take a picture looking down at the golf club through hands, as though you were the golfer and you were looking at the ball and club. Such shots enable a viewer to feel as though he or she were in the photo.

Shooting from Below

When you take a photo of a subject as you are looking up, it makes the viewer feel as if the subject is in control of a situation. It can also make the subject appear unattainable. If you think about it, putting any subject on a higher level, much as a throne is higher than other chairs, and a judge’s bench is higher than other seats in the courtroom, is a natural thing to do to impart power. The same holds true with photographs.

Shooting from Above

Whdn you shoot a picture from abofe a subject, the viewer of the photo feels superior to or protective of the subject. Seldom is a photo from above a very attractive photo for the subject involved, but it does serve to make a statement.

Common Photography Mistakes

Photography is in every way dependent on a light source. Many photo mistakes are simply a result of inadequate light, or even too much light. Occasionally, a camera might have a problem, but most often the source is operator error.

Dark Photos

If a photo is too dark, you might be quick to blame it on the lack of a flash. However, a flash is not a cure-all for dark photographs. Recorded light was not enough, for some reason. If you use a film camera, you might try a faster film speed. Doing so will decrease the amount of light needed. Adjusting the shutter speed might also increase the amount of light recorded.

Blurry Images

A blurred photograph is an extremely common problem among all levels of photographers. What makes it difficult is that there are a multitude of possible reasons for the blurry image.

Blurry Images Due to Focus

The most common reason for a blurred image is that the photographer focused on the wrong point. A picture of a cat might return with the cat out of focus, but the tree behind the cat in crystal clear view. Another reason a picture is out of focus is if the depth of field is too shallow for the subject. If you are working with an SLR camera, you can adjust a few settings to work around those focusing issues. Point-and-shoot users have fewer options, though.

Blurry Images Due to Camera Shake

The slightest vibration can have a drastic effect on a photograph. Especially in dim lighting situations, when the shutter is likely to remain open a bit longer, the shake caused by a slightly unsteady hand can result in a very poor image. Some cameras are configured with a steady shot feature that corrects for a bit of shake.

Holiday Photography

Now for the fun part. Let’s talk about how to get the very best holiday pictures. As we approach the Christmas season, we will focus on the Santa photos. If you have children in the house or in the family, you are likely to really enjoy the season and its pictures that make memories. Following are some tips on how to make sure those memories are preserved and enjoyed for years to come.

Where kids are involved, use action mode. With the fast shutter speed and quick focus, you will more likely end up with a sharp picture.

Consider using fill flash, as it can greatly improve the lighting of your subjects.

Provide for extra room in the frame, so that if your child makes sudden movements, you might still catch the action. You can crop the extra room later if you do not need it.

Use a high depth of field. You want everything to be in focus, including the Christmas tree!

Make sure the child’s expression and face is the focus point.

Be ready to take pictures before the child gets to Santa. Some of the best photos are of the emotion expressed before even greeting Santa.

Let Phillips Studio L Photography Preserve Your Memories!