



10 tips for better photography

World famous professional photographer, Chase Jarvis once said “The best camera is the one you have with you” and as more people than ever now have a smartphone in their pocket the possibility of taking great photos on your phone has never been better. I believe that everyone is capable of taking amazing images on their smartphone, but it is worth learning a few basics first in order to help you.

Whilst this guide is intended for smartphones, it can be easily applied to any digital camera. You may need to look in the manual for your camera/phone for specifics for certain settings that the camera may have.

The first thing to remember that photography is an art form, and like all other art forms can be interpreted in many ways. Therefore, I will not be adding pictures to this article so that you can interpret and apply these tips to how you like to take pictures. However, if you would like more guidance, please contact me,

1: Lighting

Photography is all about lighting – if the camera cannot see the subject (of the photo) then it cannot take it. Most camera phones will automatically use the flash if it deems the light to be too low (i.e. outside in the evening) and often this is good and correct. However, it can often blow out the subject making the photo dull and uninteresting. If you are at a party for example, it is worth taking some ‘test shots’ with your camera to work out whether or not it is best for the environment you are in to have the flash on or not. However, in most circumstances it is always best to do all you can do to ensure the lighting is good and the subject is evenly lit, except if you are wanting to create a ‘moody’ look – for example a portrait picture where you want dark shadows.

2: Composition

Most cameras do have a grid somewhere in the settings. The grid that you want is 3x3 as this is the basis of all photography and art throughout history and is just as relevant today. The 3x3 grid helps the person taking the photo to use the ‘rule of thirds’ and this forms the basics of composition. The general rule of thumb for the ‘rule of thirds’ are:

- a. If you are taking a picture of a person, ensure the eyes are always in the top third of the picture (unless the you want the scene captured behind them; for example a beautiful building).
- b. If you are taking a picture of a landscape, you should have the sky as one third and the land two thirds or vice versa.

One thing I see a lot is people taking pictures in the wrong format – for example often in portrait format. Again, as a rule of thumb it is worth turning your camera to suit the type of photo you are taking. So, if you are taking a portrait (or a selfie) take the picture holding the camera in portrait format and the same is for landscapes. However, this rule does not apply if you are taking a photo of a group of friends. Also, when using the video function more often than not it always works better to hold the camera in landscape format.

If you are taking a picture of someone, for example a young child, ensure that you are-level with that child as it is always a more flattering picture. This may mean kneeling down or even laying down on the ground to be at the same level as the child, but that few moments will make your picture much nicer.

3: Focussing

Most camera's now are often very good at focussing – but they are not always 100% and this can lead to blurred pictures. Camera phones will often focus automatically and they will often focus on what is nearest to the camera. So, for example if you are taking a picture of a pet laying on their mat but they have their bowl with their name on it between you and the pet – the camera will automatically focus on the bowl. You can often change the focus point on a camera phone by touching the screen for where you want the focus to be (in the example above you would touch where the pet is for it to be in focus). If you are using a point-and-shoot digital camera then you can lock the focus by pressing the shutter button half way and the screen will often flash green if the image is in focus.

However, in the example above with the pet and the bowl, you may not be able to get both in focus and this is because of seperational blur. The clearest way to explain how this works is for you to hold a finger up in front of your face and look at your finger. Without moving your eye and your focus you will be aware that everything to the sides of your finger is slightly blurred. Move your finger away and it is in focus again. The easiest way to combat this is to choose the focus point halfway between the foreground and the background.

4: Zoom

Where possible try not to use the zoom function on your mobile phone or digital camera. The reason for this is often the more you use the zoom, the more graining you will get in your pictures (however this can be caused when the lighting is low too). It is always best to either physically move in closer or move away in order to get the best composition for your photo. Most camera phones and digital point-and-shoot cameras only use digital zoom, and this means that rather than zooming in on a subject, the camera will instead just stretch the image and this will mean your picture will be a far less resolution and more graining will occur.

5: Your camera's settings

Okay, some would say that this is the first rule, but once you know the very basics of taking a photo you will want to start playing with the settings in order to get the best out of your photos. As stated above, Chase Jarvis once said “The best camera is the one you have with you” and so spending a bit of time playing with the settings and learning how to use the camera you are using can pay huge dividends.

6: White Balance

Usually, camera phones are pretty good at detecting the white balance, but when you get into low light they can have trouble. The first thing you can do is give the camera a second to adjust itself—if you just open up the camera app and snap away, you might get a remarkably orange picture. Give it about 5 seconds to get acclimated, and you may get a better-looking shot. You also might try pointing your phone at a different light source, which will adjust your phone to a different balance, then popping back.

However, if you've given your phone a minute to acclimate and the picture still looks off, try adjusting the white balance yourself. You can usually set it to one of a few different light settings, like "daylight", "fluorescent", or "cloudy". You may find that choosing one manually gives you a better result than the auto setting does.

7: Editing

There is nothing wrong with a little editing in order to make a good photo look great and a great photo look magical. The first rule of editing is to get it right in camera – if you take a bad photo that is poorly lit and badly focussed no amount of editing can make it look great. There are many great apps out there to use on your phone or even at home on your PC if you are using a point-and-shoot camera – and many of them are free. Why not download a couple and have a play with them to see what you can do to your pictures to make them look great. However, automatic apps in your camera (such as beautify) are often best avoided as they will reduce the clarity of your photo so smooth the skin and will then make your eyes, eyebrows, hair and lips look out of focus.

8: Don't use filters

I often see pictures on social media sites like Instagram where people have used the filters and this makes the pictures look the same. If you learn some basic editing techniques you can make your pictures look individual and great all at the same time. If you are going to add a filter, do it whilst editing as then you can easily take it off if you don't like it without having to take the picture again.

9: Join a photographic community

Because of the wonders of social media, there are literally tens of thousands of photographic communities where you can post your pictures and get hints and tips for other people on how to improve your pictures. I regularly post in around 15 groups on Facebook to get constructive criticism and I find this helps me a lot and really helped in the days when I was trying to find my style and interests. Remember, if you don't ask, you won't get!

10: Have fun!

Photography is always best (for the person taking the picture and for the subject) when you are all having fun. So, get out there with your camera, find interesting things to photograph and enjoy yourself and what you do.