How to take great photographs

**Your subject:** What do you want to capture and portray?

‘Commons’ (or alternative subject): What does your subject mean to you? What are you choosing, and why? After taking your image, question whether it turned out how you expected / wanted. Does it show what you were hoping for it to show?

Look around – ‘see’ a picture…

**Composition:**

Composition is all about what your image consists of, where and how in the ‘frame’ subjects are placed. Some key elements to consider when choosing a composition are:

- Background
- Subject placement
- Colour

*In addition, it is worth considering other elements such as Shapes/Patterns, Lines, Texture and Symmetry – the use of simple use of patterns or shapes in an image can be as powerful as a complex image.*

**Background:**

- Look all around your subject for any distractions / competing objects or colours, and remove where possible
- Change your position in relation to the subject, or the position of the subject (if possible) – think about looking at it from a different or unusual angle – looking straight down / from ground level etc and see how it affects your background
- Placement of your main focal point
- The role of your background – is it needed to show context or a key element of your image.
Placing of objects in the frame:

- Rule of Thirds: Mentally divide your intended image into 3 equal parts across and down
- Place your key focal point on one of the thirds
- Do you want to fill the frame or leave ‘space’ or show some environment / context?
- Less is more – do I ‘need’ all of the image or are some sections unnecessary?
- Think about placement within the frame

The ‘rule of thirds’:

```
  +---+---+---+
  |   |   |   |
  +---+---+---+
  |   |   |   |
  +---+---+---+
```

Placement of your subject along the ‘thirds’ lines, and specifically on the intersections, can achieve a pleasing composition for your eye to accept.

Colour:

- Am I intending to make this a Colour or Black and White image?
- Am I using complementary or contrasting colours?
- Am I using colour to make a bold statement?

Lighting:

- What light source is there? (natural, fluorescent, flash etc)
- What direction is the light source coming from?
- Is there enough/too much light?
- How should I control it? Can I use Reflectors to fill in shadows or Flags (or dark card etc) to stop light from spilling out to areas?
- Do I need to move my light source further away/nearer the subject?
- Do I need to change my exposure in camera or add a light source to the scene? (Some camera craft required for this one.)
Camera Craft basics:

Three key elements to control and adjust:
1. Aperture
2. Shutter Speed
3. ISO

1) Aperture:

Aperture is measured in ‘f stops’ or ‘f numbers’. The smaller the number, the wider the opening. The larger the number, the narrower the opening.

eg. f 2.8 = wide open aperture: let’s lots of light in
f 22 = very narrow aperture: doesn’t let much light in

Other f stops in between these examples and others wider/narrower

This diagram shows how ‘wide’ the aperture opens at different f stops:

In addition, aperture controls Depth of Field (DoF):
- The wider the aperture (smaller f number), the shallower DoF (throws background out of focus)
- The narrower the aperture (larger f number), the greater DoF (keeps focus point AND background in focus)

If your camera allows, you can put it into ‘Aperture Priority’ (usually A or AV on the dial) to set the desired DoF and the camera automatically adjusts Shutter Speed and ISO to achieve correct exposure.
2) **Shutter Speed:**

Shutter Speed refers to how long the shutter stays open for:
- The quicker the shutter speed, the sharper the action caught
- The slower the shutter speed, the more ‘motion blur’ you add in – this can be done deliberately to show movement or create ‘dreamy’ effects (such as long exposure seascapes)

*If your camera allows, you can put it into ‘Shutter Priority’ (usually S or TV on the dial) to set the desired Shutter Speed and the camera automatically adjusts Aperture and ISO to achieve correct exposure.*

3) **ISO:**

ISO is the level of sensitivity to your camera of available light.
- The lower the ISO, the better ‘quality’ of image (ie. ISO 100/200)
- The higher the ISO, the better ability to capture an image in low light or higher speed, but compromise is grainier or more ‘noise’ in the image quality

*Some editing software can do wonders in reducing this ‘noise’. Some high end (pro) camera bodies can go to a very high ISO with little degradation of image quality but most will suffer much above ISO 800 / 1000.*

*This shows the ‘noise’ at higher ISO:*
Focus:

Auto-focus:

Most compact cameras are set up for multi-point auto-focus, meaning they can automatically detect and select focus points throughout the image. This usually results in a clearly focused image in all areas. For more control over selective focus, change your camera settings to ‘single point focus’ and move the focus point to the area you want kept in sharp focus. *(You can then use Aperture Priority to vary the DoF to blur/retain sharpness in the background.)*

Manual focus:

Exactly as above, but if your camera allows, you can switch your camera body/lens to ‘Manual’ focus to allow better control over focusing – especially in ‘low light’ situations where your camera may struggle to gain focus.

Useful accessories:

Tripod – useful for low light or long exposure (very slow shutter speed) photography.

Reflectors – excellent aid for bouncing or reflecting light to control direction and fill in shadows. These can be anything from a white piece of card, or board covered in tin foil, to white walls and purpose-made pop up reflectors.

Flags – aids for ‘blocking’ or shielding light – useful for shielding subjects from direct light hitting it and causing ‘burn out’ (very bright spots where all definition is lost and irretrievable.) As with reflectors, these can be anything from a black piece of card, to ‘barn door’ style light direction modifiers.

Filters – Some useful and inexpensive accessories are filters: a UV Haze filter attached to the end of your lens can act as a protective cover for the glass. A Polarizer filter can help reduce glare and retain colours otherwise desaturated in bright light (similar to how things look when you wear sunglasses!). A ND (Neutral density) filter can reduce the amount of light reaching the sensor – useful for long exposure photography in bright light.

Editing:

Check out the editing software that will have come with your camera, or use free applications such as Picassa to make minor adjustments to your image once it is uploaded to your computer. Actions to tweak exposure, brightness and saturation, cropping and adding some creative ‘filters’ are usually fairly simple to apply. If you want to get a little more serious about editing your images, a good starter investment would be Photoshop Elements (similar to Photoshop but not all the functionality of the full version is included). Other options are Lightroom and the full version of Photoshop but do your research
before purchasing these to ensure you would make use of them due to their much higher price tag.

**Some links that may be of interest:**

[www.hayleywatkinsphotography.co.uk](http://www.hayleywatkinsphotography.co.uk)
This is my own website. I have a range of galleries showing some of my work – please take a look!

CACC (Chilterns Association of Camera Clubs):
[http://www.chilternsassociationofcameraclubs.co.uk](http://www.chilternsassociationofcameraclubs.co.uk)
This is the group encompassing all camera clubs in the Chilterns Area. You will find details of a club near to you if you are interested in exploring your photography interest further

Digital Photography School:
A great online resource for improving your camera skills, with easy to follow tutorials and practical tips.

Photrain:
[http://photrain.com/#sthash.2RKZTybA.dpbs](http://photrain.com/#sthash.2RKZTybA.dpbs)
Take your photography skills further with specially designed courses from ‘Getting Started with Digital Photography’ through to Specialist photography workshops. These guys, based in Haddenham, Bucks know what they are doing!

Put in to practise some of your skills from the day and enter your new masterpieces in a competition! Some current ones include:

**A Shot in the Dark:** [http://www.ashotinthepark.co.uk](http://www.ashotinthepark.co.uk)
Tring Brewery in conjunction with The Woodland Trust, the Natural History Museum at Tring and Millican are proud to present a new photographic competition – A Shot in The Park. Based around the themes of Life, Colour and Weather, we are looking for unique, creative and inspiring images that reflect the beauty and diversity of the Woodland Trust managed Tring Park environment.

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