

Robert's

DIGITAL
PHOTOGRAPHY
FIELD GUIDE

QUICK TIPS for GREAT PHOTOS
ANY TIME...ANYWHERE

Robert Schwarztrauber

Table of Contents

Introduction.....	Page 2
General Photography Tips.....	Page 3
Beach Photos.....	Page 4
Desert Photos.....	Page 5
Downtown Photos.....	Page 6
Fireworks Photos.....	Page 8
Landscape Photos.....	Page 9
Mist and Fog Photos.....	Page 10
Night Photos.....	Page 11
People and Pet Portraits.....	Page 12
Rain Photos.....	Page 13
Snow Photos.....	Page 14
Sport Photos.....	Page 15
Conclusion.....	Page 16
Resource Links.....	Page 17

INTRODUCTION

The digital era has brought us astonishing innovations in the past 10 years. Modern cars, computers, telephones, game consoles, and cameras are just a few of the many digitally controlled devices that have made our lives simpler, more enjoyable.

But as these devices get smarter and smarter and capable of doing more things "intelligently" for us, they also tend to add a level of frustration to our lives.

My biggest frustration was the microwave oven. Ever since they added all those 'one touch' buttons, like popcorn, I can never seem to get it right. I found it much easier and got better results when I could just manually choose 4 minutes and then stood by to listen for the popping to cease.

But that's just me.

For a lot of folks, the automatic settings on digital cameras has made their lives and photos infinitely better. They are now getting more good photos than they ever were before because of intelligent camera selections for focus, shutter speed and aperture.

But many times the camera gets fooled by complex situations and gives us pictures that are worse.

Consider taking a photo of your friends running toward you on the beach at sunset. You want to capture the bright color of the sun in the background but still want to be able to recognize your friends by their faces.

If you're on automatic mode, your camera may think that the sun is too bright and darken down your exposure so your friends' faces become too dark to recognize. That's fine if you just want a silhouette of your friends.

But if you really want to see your friends' faces you may have to manually override your camera by using the 'M' setting. In manual mode you control the shutter speed, the aperture (or lens opening) and the ISO (or light sensitivity). In manual mode, you can now better control what you want to capture, the one thing (faces), rather than allowing the camera to make lots of adjusts in an effort to give a more general good picture based on all the elements.

Theater events like concerts or plays can also be frustrating. You have the deep dark surroundings and one well lit central area.

If you try to use the automatic settings on your camera like full auto 'A' or shutter priority or aperture priority your exposures between frames can vary significantly depending upon what your camera's sensor 'saw' at the release point.

If it caught a light spot, your photo may be too dark. If it caught a dark spot when calculating, your shot may be too light because it tried to correct.

To determine if you should let your camera keep control in automatic, or if you should have control in manual mode, try a few test shots. Shoot a half dozen frames in auto mode and check your results. If you're happy stay with it.

If you're not happy, note what setting for aperture and shutter speed your camera calculated in auto mode and use those as a starting point when you switch to manual mode. Usually, with just few tweaks, you'll be able to use a similar manual setting for all your photo the rest of the night.

Just remember that a faster shutter speed will help prevent blur and will work to stop the action best. A larger aperture (lens opening like f1.5) will give you a very shallow depth of field (focus area). You may need to adjust your ISO to give you the right combination you need for shutter and aperture settings.

But now, thanks to the quick reference guides included here in this field guide , you'll never have to guess!

On the following pages you'll find easy-to-follow solutions for all the most commonly troublesome photo opportunities.

You'll know what to watch out for and what to pay attention to.

Many photographers never go back to auto mode once they discover the freedom, creativity and control possible with full manual mode.

However you choose to go, automatic or manual mode, after reading this guide you will be a much more confident photographer, ready to capture the best shots under any conditions.

Best of all, you'll always have this handy reference available on your digital reader. Ready to call up at a moments notice.

Isn't technology great!

GENERAL PHOTOGRAPHY TIPS

1. It is better to slightly underexpose than to overexpose. If you overexpose, those 'blown-out' light spots will have no data to recover. However, if you underexpose, there is often a wealth of pixel data that can be recovered (lightened) later in a digital editing program like Photoshop. My Photoshop Plans (also available in Kindle) show many 'ways to do this. Some like to remember 'Too Light's Not Right'

2. Composition Rule of Thirds: The classic composition guide which says you should divide your scene like a tic-tac-toe game, with two horizontal lines and two vertical lines. Then, place your subject or main focal point along those lines or ideally at one of the points where the lines intersect. Try to avoid placing your subject smack-dab in the center square.

If taking landscape photos, try to position your horizon at either the top horizontal line or the bottom line. Again, don't place the horizon smack-dab in the middle of your photo. And do keep your horizon level, not tilted.

3. Composition Leading Lines: Try to include objects or devices which lead your eye into the photo toward your main subject. Examples could be a road, a fence, the coastline. A countertop, rug or tabletop if indoors. If a portrait, you could use clothing or even someone's arm. Ideally, these leading lines will run diagonally (corner to corner) across your photo.

BEACH PHOTOS

Beach photography presents several challenges. You will most often be dealing with bright sunlight, glare, intense shadows, wind and water, and often people in motion.

To help you get the best photos under these condition, I recommend bringing along some items to help:

Lens Filter: at least a UV or haze filter, ideally a polarizing filter for maximum glare suppression. Filters will also help protect your expensive lens from wind-blown sand and water. A polarizing filter is significantly more expensive but will also make the water and skies bluer in your photos.

Tripod: You may find that the bright sun causes you to keep your lens opening (aperture) very small causing you to need a slow shutter speed. In some cases, only a tripod will keep your photos in sharp focus at such slow shutter speeds. A good rule of thumb is that you can only hand hold your camera, blur-free, at a shutter speed reciprocal or higher than the value of your lens setting. Example: If you're using a 50mm lens, the slowest speed you can hand hold your camera without blur would be 1/50 sec. If you had a 300mm zoom lens, the slowest hand-held speed would be 1/300 sec.

ISO: Outdoors in bright sunlight, set your camera to 100 or 200 ISO to eliminate graininess from your photos.

Camera Setting-White Balance: If your camera has settings for the type of light (most do) set your camera to Bright Sun or Cloudy depending on your conditions.

Best Time of Day for Photos: Outdoor photos are best taken in at sunrise or the hour or two after, and the hour or two just before sunset. Colors are more intense and the light is more diffused.

Types of Photo:

Landscapes: Full Beach Scenes: In order to keep everything in focus, choose Aperture Priority Mode. That will let us set a very small aperture (try f16 to start if it's a sunny day) In Aperture Priority Mode, the camera will choose the proper shutter speed for exposure based on what you set for lens opening. NOTE: For photos taken midday, in bright sunlight, your camera may tend to underexpose the scene (make it too dark) so you might want to take a test shot to see if your should bump up your exposure by one or two stops to make it right. You can use your histogram or blinking lights to see if you've gone too far.

People Close-ups: If you're in close on your subject, most times your auto mode will do a great job. Just be sure you're focused on your subject (ideally, the eyes must always be in sharp focus...always!) If your subject is running or in motion, you may want to be in Shutter Priority Mode (at 1/250 or higher) or Sports Mode to help stop the action and prevent blur.

The two biggest problem you'll face with people are squinting eyes from people looking into the sun and or deep shadows under the eyes or chine from sun that's directly overhead. If you can change positions, that's the best remedy. Or go at sunrise or sunset like the pros.

Environmental Tips: The beach can be a busy crowded place. Watch your background to avoid getting trash, waste cans, crumpled towels or any other unwanted items into your scene. If you can't move the objects or reposition yourself, try cropping a bit closer or plan on spending some time in editing later. Photoshop does a great job of removing items. You can find tips and tricks in my Photoshop Plans (guidebook also available on Kindle).

It's also a good idea to keep your camera gear inside a tightly closed plastic bag when not in use. Sand, water and especially salt water fly unpredictably and will damage your equipment.

DESERT PHOTOS

Desert photography brings many of the same problems as beach photography. You'll have to protect your equipment from sand and you'll also have to deal with the wide exposure fluctuations between bright sunny reflections and dark shadows. So not surprisingly, the extra equipment you should pack will be the same as beach photography, namely:

Lens Filter: at least a UV or haze filter, ideally a polarizing filter for maximum glare suppression. Filters will also help protect your expensive lens from wind-blown sand and water. A polarizing filter is significantly more expensive but will also make the water and skies bluer in your photos.

Tripod: You may find that the bright sun causes you to keep your lens opening (aperture) very small causing you to need a slow shutter speed. In some cases, only a tripod will keep your photos in sharp focus at such slow shutter speeds. A good rule of thumb is that you can only hand hold your camera, blur-free, at a shutter speed reciprocal or higher than the value of your lens setting. Example: If you're using a 50mm lens, the slowest speed you can hand hold your camera without blur would be 1/50 sec. If you had a 300mm zoom lens, the slowest hand-held speed would be 1/300 sec.

ISO: Outdoors in bright sunlight, set your camera to 100 or 200 ISO to eliminate graininess from your photos.

Camera Setting-White Balance: If your camera has settings for the type of light (most do) set your camera to Bright Sun or Cloudy depending on your conditions.

Best Time of Day for Photos: Outdoor photos are best taken in at sunrise or the hour or two after, and the hour or two just before sunset. Colors are more intense and the light is more diffused.

Types of Photo:

Landscapes Scenes: In order to keep everything in focus, choose Aperture Priority Mode. That will let us set a very small aperture (try f16 to start if it's a sunny day) In Aperture Priority Mode, the camera will choose the proper shutter speed for exposure based on what you set for lens opening. NOTE: For photos taken midday, in bright sunlight, your camera may tend to underexpose the scene (make it too dark) so you might want to take a test shot to see if you should bump up your exposure by one or two stops to make it right. You can use your histogram or blinking lights to see if you've gone too far.

Close-ups: If you're in close on your subject, most times your auto mode will do a great job. Just be sure you're focused on your subject (ideally, the eyes must always be in sharp focus...always!) If your subject is in motion, you may want to be in Shutter Priority Mode (at 1/250 or higher) or Sports Mode to help stop the action and prevent blur.

The biggest problem you'll face in bright desert scenes is the wide exposure range between the bright spots and the shadows. It's too much for your camera to correctly expose for automatically. What you want to remember is that it is better to have the scene too dark than to have it too light. Watch your histogram or blinking lights. Blown out areas (areas that are too light) will be distracting and cannot be recovered later. However, dark areas (shadows) can usually be brought lighter later resulting in a more pleasing photo.

Helpful Hints: Great shots in the desert can be had just before dawn and after sunset. The colors are most spectacular then and the lack of light spillover from city lights can make for some great star filled shots too.

Sunrise and sunset shots are best obtained from a tripod due to the low light conditions and the need for a small aperture to maximize focal range, a correspondingly slow shutter speed, and you'll want to keep your ISO to 100 or 200 to minimize pixel noise. The scene can change rapidly so set your camera on the tripod and take a photo every 3-5 minutes. Then, just choose the best one later as you view them on the larger computer screen.

If you must shoot midday, use the unavoidable shadows wisely. Give your subject that 3-D look, or use shadows to add drama, or as a leading line or other compositional element.

DOWNTOWN PHOTOS

The downtown section of most metropolitan areas is a veritable buffet of photo opportunities. You can choose architecture, fountains, statues or other government art, perhaps a park and certainly you'll see lots of interesting faces, rich and poor.

Lately I've been fascinated by what is most often called graffiti. I'm not talking about some gang defiling a private property, but rather of the colorful, freestyle work that communities or private businesses sponsor to give opportunity to aspiring artists while beautifying an otherwise drab brick wall.

I get this really special feeling (and a bit of guilt) knowing that I can just take a photo and decorate my home for free with millions of dollars of government or privately sponsored artwork!

Whatever you choose to photograph, here are some helpful tips that will let you safely enjoy the buffet of photo opportunity that awaits you in the big city.

What to Bring:

Lens: A 50mm or wider lens (ideally an 18-55mm zoom) is a great choice for the tight confines of the city. With that you'll be able to capture both sides of a street, tall buildings, or any artwork or architectural feature that are closer to the ground. 50mm is great for photographing people too, but don't go much wider because you'll begin to seriously distort their features, especially their nose will get too big!

It's not a bad idea to bring a longer zoom lens as well, say 50-200mm for capturing the fine architectural element and those above the second floor.

As always, a UV filter or polarizing filter are great for minimizing the glare that can come directly from the sun, but more often from reflecting off all the windows.

Tripod: During the business rush hours, (early A.M., lunchtime, and 5 P.M) your tripod could become a tripping point for pedestrians. Personal injuries could result and you could also damage your equipment. For those reasons, tripod should only be used during off-peak times. Once again, the sunrise and sunset hours offer great opportunities.

Safety: taking photographs in most major cities comes with a higher risk factor due to the vast variety of people roaming around. It is best to not travel alone if you can, especially at night. You should avoid carrying a big camera bag which can mark you as a tourist or someone with expensive goodies on board. Avoid back alleys or other suspicious places, try to stay where the people are. Many cities offer tours which are a safe bet.

Camera Setup: For people you'll want to use a 50mm lens or longer and choose a larger aperture F4.5 or less in order to blur the background which lets your subject stand out. For most other shots of architecture or details or graffiti art you'll probably want to choose a smaller lens opening (aperture) like f8 or higher to be sure you capture all the details in sharp focus. ISO 100-200 for outdoor shots. Set your camera's white balance to sunny, or cloudy depending upon your subject.

Unique Opportunities:

Reflections: The amount of glass found downtown makes reflective photography a great option. Often, a reflected view has even more character than the straight-on scene. Just remember to focus not on the glass of the building or structure, but make sure that the image in reflection is what's in focus. You may need to set the focus to manual to keep the camera's automatic system from getting confused. Rain puddles or freshly washed pavement also offers great opportunities.

Graffiti Art: The intense colors, freeform creativity, and unique textures make these spray-painted wonders really stand out. Capture them as entire mural or zoom in to capture just a portion.

Sculpture: Local communities and the Federal government spend multi-millions of dollars annually to 'beautify' our world. You can take this bounty home for free... in your camera! Photoshop can often be used to remove unwanted backgrounds or it can be used to 'spice up' that artwork and really make it your own!

Cautionary Note

Just another reminder to travel with a buddy or group for safety, especially in areas that are unfamiliar, or seem uninhabited or a bit scary. Traveling with expensive cameras is temptation enough for thieves, but our deep concentration on getting the shot right often leaves us unaware of approaching trouble.

FIREWORKS PHOTOS

Fireworks offer a unique and colorful lightshow that's seldom recorded. But it can produce spectacular results when done properly. Fortunately, getting a good fireworks photo is fairly simple. Most of the work is in the setup. That leaves you free to enjoy the fireworks too. Check with your local media sources to find out where and when events will take place in your home town.

The automatic mode will not be useful for these type of shots. This is due to the instant change of light from dark to bright and also because fireworks display their best when the full effect (trailing off) can be captured by using a longer exposure time.

Here are some tips and tricks to help you capture the best shots with your digital camera.

Tip #1...Shoot vertical. Most fireworks display best in a vertical (or portrait) orientation,
Tip #2...Use a tripod...it's a must to prevent blurry photos caused by the long exposure times needed at night.

What to Bring: Tripod (must), and a small flash light so you can see to set the camera controls, and a dark baseball cap. A remote shutter cable or wireless shutter release are also great options to have, but not essential

1. Set your camera to the longest exposure time or BULB. and aperture to f11 or f16
2. Determine where the fireworks will appear in the sky if you can, then setup your tripod and mount your camera. If you can get away from the people, traffic flow, that's best
3. Set focus to Manual mode, focused on infinity.
4. Hang your dark hat over the lens.

When you hear the first launch, press the shutter release and then gently remove your hat to show the scene. that will let you capture the streamer up until the 'pop' and then the spray. When it's done, hang your hat and repeat for the next frame.

The 'hat-trick' helps you keep from shaking the camera as you press the shutter. You could also use a wireless remote or the self timer mode (works, but hard to time accurately).

What to Watch: our goal is to record the fireworks, not the dark sky. By keeping your aperture small (f11, f16 or f22) you'll keep the sky dark and your fireworks bright and colorful. Check your results after the first shot to see.

Because we are using an ISO of 100, 200 or 400 our photos will still have less noise.

However, because we are using very long exposure (shutter) times, our only real adjustment for exposure is the size of our lens opening, our aperture.

With a little practice and experimentation you'll be taking some amazing fireworks photos.

Helpful Tip: It's always nice if you can include some landmark in your photo as well. A lit building, tower, or waterway reflection adds greatly to the scene.

LANDSCAPE PHOTOS

Great landscape photos begin with great planning. You might have to cover a lot of ground to compose the best scene possible, to consider your large subject from every angle. You might even have to return over and over again to get the elements of light and weather to cooperate with you. In some cases, you might never return to that spot again if you are traveling so it's worth the time to get it right.

What to Bring

Tripod: Every serious landscape photographer packs a tripod. Here's why: In landscape photography usually everything in your scene is in sharp focus. Everything from 3 feet in front of you until as far as the eye can see. Miles maybe. To accomplish that requires a very small lens opening.

Ansel Adams, one of America's most famous landscape photographers belonged to the 'F64' group of photographers - an organization of photographers that used very small apertures to put everything in focus. Correspondingly, that small lens opening required long exposure times or shutter speeds. Without the tripod, camera motion would have blurred everything beyond recognition. Landscape photographers pack a lightweight, yet sturdy tripod.

Lens: Pack as many as you can carry and afford. Everything is useful in landscape photography. Wide angle lenses from 18 to 50mm help capture the sweeping scenes that lie in front. While telephoto lenses 100 to 400mm help you to crop out distractions or zoom in on unique features. As long as you're out in the wild, A long telephoto will help you to capture birds or other creatures unique to the area. Be sure to bring at least a UV filter to help cut through the haze. A polarizing filter will also help with glare or reflections in direct sunlight.

Camera Bag or Backpack: Because you'll want to bring a wide variety of lenses, and maybe a drink or snack, a camera bag or preferable a backpack come in very handy. Especially since you'll also be bringing your tripod along as well. Backpacks work best because you can keep your arms and hands free for shooting and they allow you to comfortably carry more weight.

Camera Settings: Aperture Priority Mode is your best bet here. Simply set your aperture for how much of the scene you want in focus. f64 will keep more of your scene in focus than say f8. To start, try f8 or f16 and check your results. ISO set at 100-200

Blurring Water: Most of us have seen those misty looking waterfall or streams and wondered, "How'd they do that!" Well, that's another landscape trick that requires a tripod. But for a different reason. In order to make the water appear misty or blurred in motion, requires a long shutter speed. Longer shutter times makes the water more smooth and misty, while slightly less time will leave more detail in the water. Just how long to leave the shutter open will depend on condition.

For this trick, with your camera set on the tripod, set your camera to Shutter Priority Mode and start with a 1 second shutter speed. From there check your results and go shorter or longer to get the look you want. Take several shots at different shutter speeds and choose the one you like best when you get home.

On sunny days, be sure to check for hot spots or blinkies on your histogram. Always better to go slightly darker than to blow out the highlights, although with water, you often have to compromise.

What to Watch: More great landscapes are ruined by crooked horizons than anything else. Be sure to keep your camera level (they even sell levels to fit on your camera) or many tripods have built-in levels. Use something in your photo as a reference for level. But if you forget, Photoshop has a great tool for getting your level back in just three clicks. You can find that EZ fix in my Photoshop Plans book, available on Kindle.

It's easy to forget your foreground when looking off in the distance. However, including a near object in your scene adds a sense of scale and helps frame your distant subject.

Watch your time. Early sunrise and early sunset are great times for landscape photos. The light is good, shadows not too intense and the colors are at their best in these times. Ideally, you'll want to scout your best location one day ahead so that you can be at just the right spot to capture the best scene when the light is right.

Helpful Tip: When you find a great location, make a note of it. It's fun to return to the same spot several times over the year. Each season brings new features and new a new quality of light that makes the photo very different.

Landscape photos are best displayed in large scale. Be sure to have your best photos made into 24x30 or similar sized wall murals to offer the viewer the best chance to experience the scene as you did.

MIST and FOG PHOTOS

If you're an early riser, you stand the best chance of capturing mist and fog. These phenomenon occur most often in early morning and are burned off quickly by rising day temperatures and sunlight. They make for some very interesting and unique photos so if you wake to fog, get up quickly and get out the door with your camera. Since it most commonly occurs near water, scout out a few locations in advance so you'll know right where to go.

What to Bring: A polarizing filter is a good option here. It can be used to either reduce the fog or intensify it depending upon your needs.

Lens: Fog and Mist scenes are just a form of landscape scene so the same options apply with the exception of your long telephoto. Since fog and mist limit your visibility, you won't find much use for anything beyond perhaps a 200mm for a close up or cropped scene.

Camera Settings: Your automatic setting should do a great job in fog. That's because fog is a grey kind of world and your camera's auto feature is based upon an 18% grey background. You may have to dial in just a stop or two more or less depending on how light or dark you want the fog to appear. Use the smallest ISO possible to help keep the soft look of the mist and fog. 100-200 is good. As you go higher, your fog will take on an unwanted graininess. You may want to turn off your Auto-Flash feature. Any flash will just reflect back off the fine water droplets in the air and destroy your photo.

Helpful Tips: Since fog and mist occur without notice, try to image scenes that might look great with a bit of eerie mystery. Churches, buildings downtown, still lakes, docks or other rocky features all take on a special look when surrounded by fog.

NIGHT PHOTOS

The high contrast of electric lights against the dark sky makes for some spectacular scenes. Add a still lake for reflection and you have the makings of some fabulous photographs.

What to Bring: A tripod is a must because we'll be needed some longer exposure times. A cable or wireless shutter release is a great option if you have them because they prevent camera shake as you trip the shutter. If you don't have these, no problem, you can just set the camera's self-timer. Bring a small flashlight to help you see the settings in the dark.

Lens: Shorter lenses will work best here, 100mm or less. A macro flower close-up can be unique at nighttime, illuminated only by your flashlight. Or, you may choose to shoot a cityscape where a wide angle lens works best.

What Not To Bring: Many amateurs think flash is a must for night photos. The reality is a flash does little to light anything beyond 16 feet away. A flash won't help you at concerts or plays at night, nor will it help you in landscape situations. If you do want to photograph people or objects at night with a flash, be sure to keep them within 16 feet. They will cast a nasty shadow behind them too so it's best if they are free standing, not with a wall or something right behind them.

Camera Settings: Settings will depend largely on what you are trying to accomplish.

For Maximum Depth of Field (focus area) choose Aperture Mode with your camera on a tripod. Start with f8 and go higher until everything you want is in sharp focus. Take shots at each aperture setting without moving the camera and then pick the best one when you get home. Details are often hard to distinguish on those little LCD displays.

To Stop Action, choose Shutter Priority Mode and set your shutter speed to 1/lens length. (ex. 1/250 will stop action for any lens 250mm or smaller.)

To Show Blurred Motion Light: Cars on the highway look cool when you set your camera on a tripod and use a long shutter time. Instead of taillights you see red streams, instead of headlights you see white streams. While in Shutter Priority Mode, try starting with 5 seconds. Longer times will leave more intense streams.

ISO settings can be whatever works for your needs. Start with 200 to 400 and see if that lets you set your aperture or shutter where you need them. If not, go higher.

What to Watch: Any of your cameras AUTO modes can be easily misled by the big contrast between lights and darkness. In many cases you are better off going full manual and setting your shutter and apertures yourself. You can use your preview mode or histogram to get a feel for how you're doing. The histogram will show a smooth transition from high spots on the left and right (dark and light) and less in the middle. Kinda like a bowl.

Camera shake can be a major factor so avoid really long lenses. Always use a tripod for maximum sharpness. However, if a scene appears and you have no tripod, at least try to brace your camera against a solid wall or horizontal area to help minimize movement.

Helpful Tips: Bridges and cityscapes take on a bright new look at nighttime. What you may not know is that twilight, the time just before sunrise or complete sunset is actually the best time for taking these shots - when there is still just a touch of color remaining in the sky and enough light to still show some features of your subject.

You don't have to wait for a scene to appear. Get a friend to twirl a flashlight in front of you. Or, take one of those super-high powered spotlights out with you and light up something yourself. Tree tops, gardens, fields, shorelines. Give us an unusual view!

Safety: Since you'll be traveling out at night, often in unfamiliar areas, it is best to bring a friend or shooting partner along to keep an eye out while you're concentrating on your photo. You could encounter people or night critters you hadn't counted on.

PEOPLE AND PET PORTRAITS

A wise man once told me, "Pictures with People Sell". I would extend that to include pets as well. Obviously, they come with a built-in customer. Unlike landscape scenes and other artistic work that is subject to the personal taste of the viewer, we all want good pictures of those we love (including ourselves!). While great portrait photography can be a lifelong pursuit, you can learn to take a really good portrait with just a few tips.

What to Bring: Portrait photography works best with a 50mm to 100mm lens. Wide angle lenses tend to distort your subjects features, particularly those closest to the camera. Nobody wants a bigger nose!

External Flash: Unless you're shooting outdoors in a softly lit, shady area you're going to need an external light source, like a flash. Please don't use the pop-up flash found on most cameras. Those pop-ups produce a very flat, straight on, small light that's not at all flattering for portraits. They're also the cause of red-eye.

Best portraits are obtained using a soft, diffused, big light source that's close to your subject and coming from left or right of the camera, not straight on. There are many more flash types available than would fit in these tips, but use these notes as your guide to positioning. A large well-lit window at the side of your subject makes a good substitute, but put a white sheet over it if it's creating harsh shadows on your subject.

Camera Settings: Your AUTO mode should take a very respectable portrait photo. Many higher end digitals use a facial recognition that helps even more. But if you'd like your photos to take on that professional look here are some more advanced techniques:

Blurred, soft background: To get this look, use the Aperture Priority Mode on your camera. Set your aperture to f4.5 or smaller. The smaller the number, the less background area will be in focus. Be careful though, especially on dogs. Because of their longer snouts, you need to not go too extreme or their eyes will be in focus but not their nose or vice versa.

NOTE: REMEMBER THIS ALWAYS...THE EYES MUST BE IN FOCUS!

Be especially careful on dogs because most auto focus features want to read off the nearest object pointed to and that's usually their nose not their eyes. Check your manual to change the camera's auto-focus default priority.

Sharp Focus: We often want to capture every detail of our furry friends, but that's not so easy when they resist holding still. Use your camera's Shutter Priority Mode and set your shutter speed to above 1/125 second. The quick burst of light from an external flash strobe will also stop action to achieve sharp results.

What to Watch: Natural poses always look better than too stiff. Pets are great at this, people, not so much. With people keep the atmosphere fun, put on some upbeat music, act silly. Shouting "smile" from behind the camera seldom works. Every portrait doesn't have to be posed. Just follow you kids or pets around and capture them doing something they enjoy.

Helpful Tips: Get closer. Fill the frame with your subjects head or not much more than their whole body. If it feels a bit uncomfortable to be so close, that's probably just right.

Traditional portraits are shot at the same eye level with your subject. Don't shoot down on kids or pets. Get yourself down to their level. Or for a bit of creativity, lie on the ground looking up at them.

If you must use an on-camera flash indoors, use a white card or reflector to bounce the flash off the ceiling or walls to give a softer, big-light effect.

Be sure to adjust your camera's white balance for the light. Normal light bulbs will give off an orangy light, fluorescents give off a greener light, while flash tints blue. An improper setting will have your photos all tinted improperly.

If you'd really like to learn more about the exciting field of portrait photography and advanced lighting techniques, send an email to: robert@totalfitnessphotography.com
Subject: Portrait Info

RAIN PHOTOS

Adventurous photographers don't pout when it rains, they just change their strategy! A rainy day offer many unique photo opportunities. The rain adds texture, reflections, and colors not seen at any other time.

What to Bring: Protecting your camera gear from the elements is high priority. A good soaking can ruin your electronics and lenses. Bring a large ziplock bag to protect your camera when not shooting. A waterproof camera bag is a good idea, but not essential. You should definitely bring an umbrella for walking to and from your photo scenes. But you will find it hard to shoot while holding the umbrella. Many times you can stay dry in your car and just roll the window down to shoot. Or not. Bring a dry, lint-free cloth to wipe your lens.

Camera Settings: Since the light is diffused and fairly even you can use AUTO mode with good results. Aperture Priority Mode will allow you more flexibility to choose your depth of field for the scene. If your shutter speed goes too low for a hand-held shot (less than the length of your lens) try raising your ISO to 400. It's unlikely you'd use Shutter Priority Mode unless there is some motion you want to stop or some creative effect you need from the motion.

What to Watch: Obviously you'll have to stay vigilant to keep your camera dry. Protect it with your coat or keep in the plastic bag when not shooting. Check your lens for water spots and wipe as needed with the lint-free soft cloth.

Helpful Tips: The even, diffused lighting and surface wetness tend to make colors really 'pop' in the rain. Use this to your advantage by shooting colorful objects, like umbrellas!

Add people to your photos carrying umbrellas, wearing bright-colored boots or raincoats or jumping in puddles.

Look for interesting reflections in puddles. Look for that single precarious raindrop or zoom in on the raindrop's reflection.

Look for interesting cloud patterns before or after the rains. Especially look for rainbows.

Try some shutter speed experiments. 1/200 second can stop a raindrop in mid air. If you can setup on a tripod, speeds of 1/15 or less will make those raindrops disappear because they are too fast to be recorded. Slow shutter speeds can create a misty looking or blurred scene that's quite interesting.

Get out, have fun! Rain can produce the kind of interesting pictures we all love to see. Because most folks are just too timid to go out in the rain to get them. You know better!

SNOW PHOTOS

There's no photos like snow photos! But they're not gained without some challenges. Obviously, there is the cold. Not so obvious are the bright reflections that play havoc with your camera's exposure sensors.

What to Bring: A polarizing lens filter is a great way to cut down on the glare from the bright snow. It can also help make those drab winter skies look a lot bluer.

Be sure to dress warm, with a good insulated pair of boots. You might want to consider bringing two types of gloves. A thick skiers type glove which is great when walking around and a pair of thin, leather driving gloves for use when taking photos. Maybe you'll want a pair where you can flip the fingers out to grip the camera better.

Camera Settings: Any of your camera modes should work well here. You can just decide on the best mode for what you are shooting. If you're feeling a bit lazy or timid, use the fully Automatic Mode. If you're shooting a still landscape scene choose the Aperture Priority Mode for control over the depth of field. If you're shooting downhill skiers, choose the Shutter Priority Mode to either freeze or amplify the motion.

ADJUSTMENT NOTE: The brightness of the snow in relation to the rest of the scene fools your camera's exposure sensors to darken your photos. This often results in grey, not white snow. To compensate, manually adjust +1 or +2 stops lighter.

What to Watch: Quick temperature changes from cold to warm will tend to fog your lens (just like they do your glasses!) Wait 10 to 15 minutes for the temperatures to equalize. Wipe with a soft, lint-free lens cloth if needed. Windy or snowy conditions can put spots on your lens. Check prior to shooting.

Batteries lose their power faster in cold temperatures so be sure to bring extras.

Safety: Be sure to protect your body from extreme cold. Don't stay out too long. Remember as you venture off, that you'll have to walk an equal distance to get back. Don't let your feet, fingers or ears get frostbite.

Be especially careful in walking areas that are unfamiliar. A layer of snow can hide many elements underneath, like really deep snow, or holes, objects you might trip over, or even an ice covered waterway. Best to travel with a friend or group in unfamiliar areas.

Helpful Tips: Snow provides a great white background so look for things of color or contrast to bring into the scene. Look for interesting patterns or tracks in the snow. Look for how the snow covers over objects. Look at how it hangs in the trees after a fresh snowfall.

Use the light and shadows to give an interesting 3-D effect.

Go back to the same scenes you shot in summer and fall then compare.

SPORT PHOTOS

Whether you want to stop the action or exaggerate it, sport photos are always exciting. Little league games, pro sports, or just recreational stuff. There are tons of opportunities for sport photographers to get their fix.

What to Bring: A telephoto lens is a must for sports photography. The bigger the field of play the longer the lens you will need. A zoom to 400mm lens would certainly serve most of your needs but will set you back quite a few dollars. Figure on at least a lens that zooms to 200mm. If you can afford a lens with Image Stabilization that's a good option.

Monopod: Really long lenses require a lot of stability to prevent motion blur. But a tripod is useless for sports photography because the point of action moves widely and rapidly. An alternative is the Monopod. Basically you attach your camera to a stick that you can plant on the ground to help stabilize your camera better than just hand-holding the extra weight of your camera and long lens.

Camera Settings: Choose Shutter Priority or Sport Mode if your camera has one. Set your shutter speed to just higher than the length of lens you are using. Example: if you are using the 400mm lens setting, you must keep your shutter speed higher than 1/400 to prevent blur. If you are using the 200mm setting, you must keep your shutter speed higher than 1/200 to prevent blur. See how that works? If you're going to be zooming in and out a lot, a good rule of thumb is to set your shutter speed at the longest possible lens size. In this case, we would set our shutter speed to 1/400 and leave it there. That way, if we shoot zoomed full out at 400mm we're good and if we shoot at 200mm we're still good.

ISO: You may need to raise your ISO to accommodate the high shutter speeds needed.

Sports Program Mode: Allows your camera's Auto-Focus feature to follow or predict the action on the field. It continually samples the focus and adjusts at a more rapid pace than usual to help you get a good shot. This works well for Soccer or Basketball where you have a large playing field and unpredictable action.

Manual Focus: For sports like football or baseball or swimming that have more predictable action, you might consider switching to manual focus mode. You can watch the action through the viewfinder and glide the focus ring slightly as you move. When the time is right, press the shutter and stop the action.

What to Watch: Your biggest foe here is motion blur. You're moving and the action is moving so try to keep your shutter speed high. If there are other fans nearby be careful of knocking them with your long lens. And be careful of getting them into your photo as you move. If you're near to the field, it's easy to lose track of the big picture with your eye to viewfinder. Many a pro sports photographer has been knocked to the ground trying to get "the Shot". Your insurance or motives may not be so hot, so be careful out there.

High shutter speeds mean wide lens openings. This causes a very small depth of field so you have to be very selective and accurate on your focus points. Long telephoto lenses increase your need for accurate focus. Bumping up your ISO will help you get a more forgiving aperture setting, but at the expense of bringing some graininess to your photos.

Helpful Tips:

Zone Focus is a technique where you pre-focus on a particular area in your scene, say the basketball hoop. You know eventually a shot is going to go there and you'll be ready at exactly the right moment. Works in soccer too or lacrosse. You focus on one zone area and wait.

Panning is a technique for capturing action and conveying speed. This creates a dramatic background blur as you move your camera in sync with your subject. Great for any fast moving event like skiing, NASCAR, or horse racing. For this you'll set your shutter speed one stop slower than you normally would. Focus on your moving subject and track it by moving your head and camera. Keep your subject in the same position in your viewfinder at all times. Press the shutter without stopping your movement. If you can hold down your shutter to take several consecutive shots you'll stand the best chance of getting a good one.

Mixed Lighting Many times your sporting event will be at night. Picture those tall bright lights perched high atop the poles. All these poles of light cause uneven lighting across the field. If you let your camera try to adjust your shots will be light and dark depending on what area you were shooting in. A better option is to go full manual and adjust the shutter and aperture yourself. Take a photo of one area of the field and see how you like it. Once you find a suitable exposure, just leave it there and continue shooting. When you're done, all your shots will have that same look and feel. This same technique works for nearly any event that's lit, day or night, like plays, concerts or theater.

Conclusion

You now know a great deal more than just about any photographer out there. But you don't have to remember it all, because the information is here for you to look back on any time you need it!

Ansel Adams said, "The secret to getting good photos is to take lots of photos." He felt if he got one great photo in a month he was doing good. So don't be too hard on yourself, just get out there and practice!

More of Robert's Resources for Digital Photographers

Note: You may click on the bold type link under each to go right to the websites indicated

If you'd like more information on fun and creative photography techniques that anyone can do, visit my website often at:

<http://CreativePhotographyTricks.com>

If you need guidance on Photoshop tips and tricks, "Photoshop Plans" or "Photoshop Recipe Cards" are two great books filled with easy to do, step-by-step instructions for doing all the popular Photoshop edits. I've sold hundreds of these books around the world to help folks just like you get good at Photoshop in no time at all. If you're looking for the easiest, low-tech solution to mastering the high-tech Photoshop software, visit:

<http://PhotoshopTipCards.com>

Discover the Photo Fitness Phenomenon! Get fit and happy for life with Robert's exclusive 6-Step System for lifelong Photo Fitness at:

<http://FitnessPhotoCourse.com>

Discover the digital photographer's secret to staying fit and happy at:

<http://TotalFitnessPhotography.com>

Get a dose of motivation, education, and fun...especially for photographers! Great insights, tips and tricks for photographers. Get yours at:

<http://shutterbugshaman.com>

You can also email me with any questions or comments you have at:

robert@TotalFitnessPhotography.com

*****This Month's Special: [Photoshop Recipe Cards Book](#)*****



Click on Book For Instant Savings!

©2012 Robert Schwarztrauber

Copyright laws prohibit reproduction, distribution or resale of this material in any form, including electronic duplication or print, for free or for sale, without the express written permission of the author. Violators will be prosecuted to the full extent of the law. You may print copies **for your own personal use** to take in the field on your photo adventures.