

Seven Keys for Better Photos

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Light

Watch the time of day for the best light (Golden Hour, the hour nearest sunrise/sunset has magical color). Play with the direction of light (front-lighting is flat on subject, side-light highlights textures and gives sense of volume to subject, backlight comes from behind subject and makes leaves and flower petals glow). Environmental influences change light (pale cliffs bounce light, autumn leaves add their color into light, snow reflects light). Use weather: clear skies have ordinary light, individual clouds give checkerboard light onto the landscape, storms have dramatic light, overcast clouds create diffused light (good for close-ups). Minimize an overly bright sky by cropping it out or overlap an element such as a tree branch to mask it. Use "Exposure Compensation" (plus numbers make brighter image, minus numbers make darker image). *How can I showcase the light for visual impact?*

Composition

Simplify the number of elements (less is more); juxtapose opposites (light/dark, warm/cool, large/small, rough/smooth, mysterious/resolved), arrange for visual order from chaos (arrange elements and shapes by changing your physical point of view, move your feet), relate elements of scene to each other (interesting clouds and rock formations, a structure and its environment), use diagonal lines or shapes to add engaging visual energy. *How can I eliminate distractions for a more orderly design?*

Depth

Add clues of dimension (find a foreground element to add to your composition, use an element that you can reach out and touch, contrast near and far). Three dimensional clues: Size Change, a fencepost closer to viewer is taller than a fencepost farther in the distance; Overlap, one element hides part of another element; Atmospheric Perspective: landscape elements near viewer appear more vibrant in color and contrast than the pale mountain range in the far distance. Use these clues to emphasize depth of a scene. *How can I exaggerate the sense of depth?*

Focus

Control depth-of-field with the aperture, large f-stop numbers make everything sharp (deep range-of-focus) and small f-stop # makes shallow range-of-focus (use to contrast a sharply-focused subject with an out-of-focus background). Emphasize the point of interest; avoid distractions (examine edges and corners for stray or confusing elements); guide the eye through the image (use visual pathways such as connect-the-dots with a series of elements). *How can I emphasize this subject with intentional focus?*

Vision

See the potential for the completed image (envision the image in a picture frame or on a magazine cover); ask yourself "What can I do to improve this photo?" and then clarify and simplify the composition; change your viewpoint (move your position, maybe lower your vantage point closer to the ground); make corrections with "White Balance" (change setting to "Cloudy" or "Shade" to give image a warmer feeling). Challenge yourself to make a better photo. *How can I improve my image and explore my idea even further?*

Intimacy

The gem of any relationship is intimacy. Get to know your subject. Spend time with it, look for its uniqueness, become more familiar, return to it again and again, and discover its nuances. See with inclusive awareness how the subject relates to its environment. Find ways to show relationships within your photo. Keep examining the subject to learn more and more about it. We add value to what we give our attention to. *How can I better understand my subject?*

Passion

Your enthusiasm will give you energy to enjoy making progress as you solve challenges. Research your favorite subject and find better techniques to capture it. Find confidence in your choices. Be the eyes that show us something we hadn't noticed before. Capture photos that inspire and intrigue us. *How can I more faithfully engage my curiosity?*