



Digital Photography Mastery

DIGITAL
PHOTOGRAPHY
MASTERY



What not to do



As a human being, I believe our greatest trait to be the ability to learn from our mistakes and grow. On reflection though, it doesn't seem to be one that the photographers of this world have inherited.

If there's some kind of mistake to be made, you can be sure that as a photographer that you will almost definitely make it, and not necessarily only the once. There are times that you will make the same mistake over again.

And that's not even necessarily through the fact that you don't learn from mistakes. It's more from the fact that there are so many mistakes to make, that you just have a greater choice to choose from, thereby making it easier for you to do something you shouldn't.

Like leaving the lens cap on while you take the shot of your life. Or ignoring that fallen branch just in front of you only to trip on it and fall wildly into your shot and thereby change everything around and gain a few bruises in your efforts to save your camera.

I could go on for hours on end reciting all the things that have gone wrong for me at some point in my photographic life or other, but I'm pretty sure that would only send you into gales of laughter so I decided against giving you anything too specific.

You can infer what you want from these little tips of what not to do, but rest assured that if you're even thinking of taking up photography, you will make at least one if not almost all of these mistakes.

And if you've been at this for some time now, then you know that what I'm saying is true. Indeed, you would have made a number of these mistakes yourself at one point or another.

I can assure you that no matter how hard you try, there's always bound to be a time when you will make these mistakes, and it won't matter if you've already made them before.

Just don't worry if – and when – it happens to you. The best thing you can do is to pick up the pieces, move on and try you hardest not to do it again, or at least not to do it again within the span of a few months! That way you won't feel as bad – maybe.

So here they are, in no particular order, the list of things that you shouldn't do, or rather the list of that you should avoid trying to do if you want to get a great picture.

The List

Here's the list in short, with a detailed summary for each one following thereafter.

- Not taking in the “big picture”
- Viewfinder masking
- Auto metering
- Handholding the camera
- Getting your dates mixed up

Not taking in the “big picture”

This is a very common mistake and one that most beginning photographers will make more often than not.

Having tunnel vision where your shot is concerned can kill off a photograph easier than anything else.

When you look over a scene you need to realize that what you're seeing isn't only the interesting looking flower that dominates the garden, but also is the surrounding in which the flower is in.

You don't necessarily have to include the whole scene in your photograph, but by understanding what drew you to the flower in the

first place, you have the option of using elements from its background in a suitable way to help make your shot even better.

Taking in the big picture also involves taking in light levels and the direction from which that light is coming into your picture.

Then again, if we go back to the example of the flower, you might have focused in on the flower to begin with and you might get some great photographs of it, but what happens if you suddenly expand your view and take in the big picture.

You might now find that the world has opened up to you more and that you now have some even greater photo opportunities to choose from.

As you can see, taking in the big picture doesn't need to be about taking in the whole scene or even of using the whole scene effectively, those are just a few ways of going about it.

So don't miss the leaves for the trees, so to speak. Take in everything that you see around you, and make it a natural habit to process what you see and run it through your own mind filter to see what will make a great photo op, and what won't.

Train yourself to do this, to see the big picture, and you'll find that your photography has taken a turn for the better.

Then again, don't miss the trees for the leaves, by ignoring a perfectly good spontaneous shot because you're thinking too much.

Once you train yourself you will find that you almost automatically scan and process an area for photographic potential.

This will become an ingrained habit, but if something caught your attention in the first place, then make it also make it a habit to take that shot in first, and not to let the small moment out of your hands in lieu of the bigger picture.

As you can see it can at times become difficult to know what exactly to do with such a clear cut set of conflicting rules for you to follow, but I have to say that having a digital camera makes things easier all around.

Now, you can shoot first and ask questions later as you don't have to worry about the expense of wasted film.

You can take in as many shots as you want and then discard the ones that you don't want, perfecting the overall composition of your shot.

Viewfinder masking

This is actually a problem that most photographers aren't aware of, or which they have simply forgotten all about.

With the ability to see everything in your little screen before and after you've composed and taken a photograph, sometimes it's very easy to forget things like viewfinder masking.

To the uninitiated viewfinder masking is about the shot you think that you're taking and the shot that eventually get.

In other words and hopefully to make things simpler, what you see in the viewfinder of your camera is definitely not all of what you get.

The shot that you compose in the viewfinder is only partially correct, or to take things a step further, it's only 90% correct.

True, everything that you frame in your shot will come through exactly the way you wanted it, but there will also be an added 10% percent of image space added to your shot.

So when you finally get around to taking a long hard look at your pictures you might be surprised to find in it some elements that you hadn't planned for, along the outer edges of your photograph.

The only way to compensate for this problem is to either crop each and every one of your photographs by 10% all around, which is as fruitless as it is impractical.

Or you could just compose your shot with this in mind, and frame it tighter leaving about 10% of your desired shot out of the picture to begin with.

And just about now, I can hear the indignation in your voice when you ask me just how on earth I expect you to be able to accurately

gauge 10% of all your photographs to be able to leave it out of the viewfinder.

And all that I can say is that it will take you time and experience to be able to do it well to any degree, but if you don't start now, you won't be able to do it at any point in time.

However, it does get easier with time, and you will find yourself doing it automatically after a few successful practice runs.

Auto metering

We've talked about this before in the section "Manual or Automatic?", but I'll just lightly touch upon the subject again here.

By keeping your camera kept solely on the automatic mode, or auto metering mode, you're taking away any chance that you might have of getting in some really good shots.

No matter how expensive or how good your camera is, it isn't alive and it can't think for itself.

When you keep it on auto mode all that you're doing is telling it to go to one of the preprogrammed exposures which it might feel is right for the scene, and which is dependant wholly on the amount of light coming in through to the digital sensors.

It can't judge for itself whether this is the correct setting or whether going down half a stop or up a full stop might not be better overall for the picture.

It won't know whether to focus on one thing or the other, and sometimes if you're not looking properly it won't even know whether to focus properly at all.

The camera is merely a tool that you should use to get your idea across. It can't see through your eyes and see what you see in a scene, and it almost definitely can't tell the difference between a good shot and a bad shot.

And that's where you come in. By taking your camera off the auto metering you're doing yourself a great favor.

Now instead of preprogrammed exposures dictating what your shot will look like, you have the chance to bring out in your pictures the images that you saw in your mind's eye when you looked at a particular scene.

So keep off the auto metering and switch instead to manual mode, you'll be pleasantly surprised with the results and once you get the hang of it, I know that you'll be amazed at the amount of control you have over your shots.

Handholding the camera

You've left your tripod at home and now you have to handhold your camera. This is alright at very high shutter speeds, but in most cases you will get camera shake although you might not be able to see this by just looking at the end picture.

However, the minute that you blow up the picture to anything beyond the normal family photograph size, you will see the camera shake come to life.

Obviously if you've left your tripod at home there's not too much you can do about it, but for the next time I would probably see about keeping the tripod in an easily accessible and non-forgettable place.

Having said that, there are however times when you will be forced to handhold your camera, even if you have the tripod sitting right beside you.

For these times you should really find a way to make yourself as steady as possible, and maybe even use yourself as a makeshift tripod.

You still won't get the quality pictures that you were aiming for, but that said, many a great picture was taken on the fly with no time to set up tripods or anything.

So don't discount your handheld photographs from the running either, just make sure that you keep the handhelds to a minimum.

On the subject of making yourself the tripod, this is very easy and most of the time comes naturally enough to us anyway.

What's the first thing that you do when you pick up a camera and have to take a picture without a tripod at your disposal?

You brace yourself. That's right, you brace yourself, and make yourself as immovable as the Rock of Gibraltar.

You spread your feet to about shoulder width apart, you keep your arms close in to your body and you plant yourself either firmly onto the ground or up against a convenient leaning like a wall, a post or a fence.

Getting your dates mixed up

This might sound a bit odd, but if you think about it there are probably one or two times that you turned up to an event on the wrong day, either before or after it happened.

Or there are always those times when you missed something by a matter of a few hours instead of days.

Those are the times when you really feel like kicking yourself, especially if the event is a once in a lifetime thing, or something that happens only once a year.

There's not much that you can do about it except kick yourself and hope for better luck and organizational skills next time.

Of course, sometimes it doesn't even help to have good organizational skills. You could have a big sign with the time, date and event to attend posted in big letters exactly where you can see it at any given moment, but there's always a chance that something will happen at the last minute to disrupt everything and make you late or forget entirely where you should be.

On the scale of things going wrong because you missed the date or time of a given event, if it was purely for your own photographic benefit then I have to say hard luck and maybe you'll do better next time.

But if it was something along the lines of missing an event that you were scheduled to do but missed, then all I can say is heaven help you.

On my list of things to avoid, I have to say that missing a wedding because of date mess-ups is a bit embarrassing.

I would also prefer to run a mile in any direction if ever I came into contact with the not-so-happy-with-photographer couple. (I'm not necessarily saying this happened to me, only that it's what I would prefer to do!)

Checklist

This is a good thing to have with you, whether it's in your head, or written down somewhere you can see it.

For a photographer there should ideally be two checklists, the one that you use before leaving the house, even if it is only for a short drive up the valley to get the perfect shot.



And the checklist you should get used to using every time you're at the shoot or on the point of taking the shot. This obviously doesn't need to be on a paper.

After having extensive photographic hours under your belt though, you'll find that this particular checklist is in your head.

The one that you do before you leave the house though, should preferably be written down somewhere as it's always very easy to forget some small, highly important piece of equipment in your rush to get out of the house.

I can, and have forgotten many things amongst my other blunders and highly recommend that you get into the practice of using checklists, even if it is only for the one before you leave the house.

I can tell you that the last thing that you want to contend with is the loss of a spare battery when you're halfway down the Grand Canyon, with no way of getting to them again until you get back to civilization.

That said, in my opinion the most important checklist will be that of the one before you leave the house and drive off into the sunset.

With the other checklist you can take it as it comes and if you're shooting in RAW format then you can always make an attempt at some kind of recovery of your shot.

You just can't do that though if you're unable to take the crucial shot due to lack of proper equipment. So because of this factor I've taken the time to get you my before-I-leave-the-house checklist.

I've not included the second checklist, the one you should look into just before taking a photograph or setting up your equipment because everyone will have a different method of going about that.

And just like I have one way of doing things, you will have another completely way different way of looking into things.

Before you leave the house

This checklist I would definitely recommend that you make, and that you take the time to look into.

Like I was saying earlier you definitely don't want to be stuck in the middle of nowhere with an amazing scene on your hands and no vital piece of equipment.

Here's the list for you first and foremost. There might be a few things that I've missed out on, but you can always fill it in as you go along.

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The End

There's not too much more that I can add to what you've gone through in this book. All I can say is that hopefully you liked what you read, and that it was of help to you.

It doesn't matter if you're only a weekend photographer, a family-fun photographer, or a wanna-be professional photographer. There will always be many ways for you to improve in what you can already do.

For myself, I found that the further I went along in writing this book, the further I went in understanding that there was a lot more that I could do to improve my own photographic efforts.



Although it took me the writing of this book to understand this idea, once I got it fixed firmly in my head and had examined it from all sides I have to say that it was uppermost in my mind most of the time.

So along with hoping that you enjoyed reading this book and that you gained insight into digital photography, I also hope that you felt inspired to try and achieve greater heights in your photography.

And that's why it doesn't matter whether you're a beginning photographer or whether you're a professional photographer.

There will always be greater heights to which you can push yourself, and if you just take these few steps to achieve this, your photography will be the better for it.

So here's hoping that you take great pictures, buy great gadgets and keep on having fun at what you do best. (Hopefully that will be taking photographs!)