



## 5 WAYS TO IMPROVE YOUR PHOTOGRAPHS

### 1. Choose interesting subjects

With the camera market expanding in geometric proportions, one of the best ways to make your imagery stand out is to be unique. This does not mean to take pictures that no one else takes, but to present pictures in a unique way. Too often, people think that being unique means taking pictures no one else has taken. Okay, so you took that picture of a tape dispenser. No one else has a picture of a tape dispenser in their gallery right? Well, not necessarily, because with as many of us as there are, the odds of finding a subject matter that has not been taken is much more challenging.

Additionally though, you need to ask yourself whether the subject matter (a tape dispenser), is even something that is inherently interesting. It could be that there are not many galleries of tape dispensers all over the internet simply because tape dispensers are not all that interesting. I mean no offense to tape dispenser aficionados, but there likely is not much of a market for tape dispenser photography.

You need to be selective in your subject matter. Ask yourself why you are taking the picture. When out recently with a friend, he pointed out a wood duck to me in the water, suggesting that I should capture the duck on camera. I asked myself whether I needed another picture of a duck on my hard drive and whether I would ever print it or not. When I answered no to both questions, I put my camera down. If it's not a compelling image for you or does not have any impact on you as a photographer— it likely will not be compelling or have an impact to viewers or buyers.

### 2. Be aware of lighting and its impact on your picture.

We all know about the golden hours, right before sunrise and right after sunset, but this does not mean we can't shoot at other times of the day...life goes on outside of these hours. What it does mean is that we need to be more careful about the impact lighting has on our pictures. Is the light directly overhead? Are there shadows? Is there cloud cover? What impact does this have on the lighting? What direction is the light coming from? What about interior lighting – are you using strobes or flashes? A great website, [www.strobist.blogspot.com](http://www.strobist.blogspot.com) has a wealth of information on lighting and how to accentuate it and make your subjects just fly off the print. Dramatic lighting can make or break an image, and it's something to think about before tripping the shutter.

### 3. Watch out for distractions

Often times, in our excitement to capture a moment, we will include something that, in retrospect, we really wish wasn't there to begin with. I was at a wedding last summer and the photographer had the wedding party all lined up for a formal pose, with the scenic greens of the golf course behind them. The problem: the marker was jutting straight up behind the head of the bride! I didn't realize it myself as I was off to the side, taking causal pictures as an attendee, rather than as the formal photographer. My two shots were easily fixed, but I bet the computer time spent for the pro was a lot higher to clean that up in several dozen photos after the fact! Hopefully it made a lasting impression on her though, and she'll be more attentive to that in the future.

So, before pressing that shutter, take a moment to visually scan around the viewfinder or display – and look for errant objects that may detract or distract from the main subject. While yes, some things can be fixed afterwards, it's always better to get it right in camera!



#### **4. Be aware of your gear choices**

With the quality of gear on the market these days, we have to worry less and less about limitations or lower image quality in the gear that we use. Certainly, with bodies that can produce 22-megapixel images, and zoom lenses that can magnify the eye of a fly with tack sharp results, it's no wonder that more and more people are becoming avid photographers.

While the gear can definitely be a contributing factor, there are always limitations to consider. For example, you certainly would not want to shoot a rock concert with a cell phone camera or a macro lens. Equally, you would not want to take your expensive SLR camera down to the beach while horsing around playing Frisbee. Camera bodies and lenses have varying degrees of durability and purpose. In particular, it helps to remember the effects some gear selections can have on pictures. For example, it is always helpful to remember that wide angle lenses will have more distortion at the edges, and longer lenses will compress subjects that are further away. Focal length and depth of field capabilities will also contribute to how much of the background is out of focus, and how blurry that background is. As another example, portraiture usually gets its best results when everything but the subject is out of focus and blurred, thus moving the viewer to look at the subject rather than the background. Being aware of the effects lenses and bodies have on images, as well as the limitations of their focal lengths and f-stops can help you in composing your shots according to the purpose of the lens. Ultimately, the goal is to have more keepers and fewer throw-away shots. By shooting with your gear choices in mind, you can positively impact your keeper percentage.

#### **5. Watch for colorful contrasts.**

While there are always exceptions to this rule, photos will generally be more appealing if you have good contrasts in color. Complementary colors that work well together can bring life to an image. Additionally, contrasting colors can also do the same thing. When out with a photo club recently, I saw a flower and not only did it have some water dewdrops on it, but sky in the background was a stark blue. The blue and the red of the petal really made the decision to capture a "no-brainer" for me.

What about black and white photography? While there may not appear to be colors in this form of photography, there are tonal ranges and the contrast of black against white and vice versa is yet another way that we can really make pictures come to life.

Another type of photography is lomography where colors are intentionally of unusual contrast, saturation, and are bland in their presentation. While this does have a certain niche appeal, it is unlikely that "Lomo" photography will extend into widespread usage.

Ultimately, only you can decide what you want to do with your images, and what images work best for you. Adhering to a set of rules discourages creativity and thinking of new ways to express yourself. So, if you feel that you've got the basics down pat, by all means, venture into new territories with gusto. For the rest of us though, general rules and guidelines that provide a frame of reference (sorry for the "frame" pun), can help us focus on what needs improvement in our own endeavors. Hopefully the above listing of things to remember will be of use, and provide a helpful frame of reference to those that would like to become better as photographers.