

10 quick tips for taking beautiful photos

If you want to take a beautiful photograph, point your camera at a beautiful thing. That seems simple enough, but it is amazing how many people miss this most basic rule. Once you have found something beautiful to photograph, here are 10 essential tips to help you better capture and share the beauty.

1. Learn all about your camera—even if your camera is a smart phone.

Take time to understand the features and how they work. Read the manual or watch a few YouTube videos. Practice and experiment with the various features. Learn the different shooting modes and how to match those to best capture the type of image you are photographing.



2. Don't place subjects directly in the middle—especially the horizon.

Imagine a tic-tac-toe grid placed on top of your image. In fact, just about every camera and smartphone has a feature where you can turn on a tic-tac-toe overlay grid in the viewfinder or display. Now place your subject at one of the four intersections where the vertical lines cross the horizontal lines. This is called the rule of thirds, which helps emphasize the subject and allows the eye to naturally be drawn into the photograph.

3. Orient your camera to match the shape of your primary subject.

Think of when you print from your computer and when you choose portrait (vertical) or landscape (horizontal). Those modes are called that for a reason. As a basic rule, when taking portraits, orient your camera with the short side along the horizon. When taking landscapes, orient your camera with the long side along the horizon.

4. Watch out for other objects in front of and behind your primary subject.

Our eyes can naturally ignore things in our field of vision, but the camera cannot. You may not see that tree growing out of your subject's head or people in the background, but the camera will. Look at the whole scene before shooting the photograph. Move your subject or move your camera angle to create the most pleasing and non-distracting foreground and background for your subject.

5. Take your photos during the “Golden Hour.”

This is the first hour after sunrise and the hour before sunset. The light from the sun when it is low on the horizon is diffused which results in softer light and complementary highlights and shadows. It makes for beautiful landscapes and adds a healthy glow to portraits.

6. Use the daytime shade.

When you want to take a portrait during the day, get your subject into the shade and have them look out toward the sunlight or the open sky. The shade can be by the side of a building or under a tree or umbrella. Be sure your subject is in 100 percent shade and not dappled light.

7. Don't shoot down on a subject.

This is especially true for children, pets and flowers. Get down to their level. This yields a more pleasing result that focuses on their beauty and not on their size relative to the world in which we live.

8. Point your subject's feet.

When making a portrait, have the subject point their feet at a 45-degree angle to the camera and then turn their face to the camera. The reason no one likes their driver's license photo and why mug shots always look so bad is because these photos are taken with the subject's shoulders parallel to the camera.

9. For portraits, always focus on the eyes.

The eyes are the window to the soul. Therefore, they should never be hidden behind sunglasses. Yes, sunglasses can lend a coolness to a subject, but it's the eyes that draw a person into a portrait. Make sure we get to see them. And place them along the top horizontal line in the tic-tac-toe grid to make sure they are emphasized in the image.

10. Editing your photo is not a sin.

In fact, all professional photographers do this. Take a little time to learn the tools available. For smartphones, Instagram has some nice filters and tools. So does a product called [Snapseed](#). For digital cameras, [Adobe Lightroom](#) has excellent tools in their development module. If you didn't quite get the composition you wanted, it's okay to do some cropping.

Following these tips will help improve your photographs. But there is nothing that will make you a better photographer more than practicing and experimentation. If you want to challenge yourself, take and share one photo a day on Instagram or Facebook for an entire month. Or go on a photoshoot and limit yourself to just 24 shots.

Finally, when you want to share your photos with the world via social media, be selective. Each day share just your best single photo, and not a bunch of photos. Don't let your one great photo get lost among all your other images. If you are traveling and sharing a number of images from your trip, make sure each one represents a unique aspect of your trip. No one wants to see the Eiffel Tower from 10 different angles, or 10 different shots of your family from slightly different angles in front of the Grand Canyon. But we do want to see the best one.

Now go out and start making beautiful photographs. Shoot early, shoot often and shoot the stuff you love. And, most importantly, have fun.

Here's a visual breakdown of the tips:

TIP	Bad Photo	Good Photo
1 – Learn your camera	Shot in the basic mode.	Shot in portrait mode.
2 – Location of subject in photo	Subject is right in the middle	Subject's face is higher up in frame.
3 – Camera orientation	It's a portrait shot in landscape mode.	It's a portrait so it's in portrait mode.
4- Control the background	Tree coming out of her head, busy parking lot behind subject.	Nothing in the background takes away from the subject.
6- Open Shade	Harsh light on subject is not flattering, shows hot spots and shadows.	The shade protects subject from the direct sunlight, softening everything up.
8- Angle of Subject to Camera.	Shoulders parallel to the camera, subject looks uncomfortable.	Shoulders angled to the camera, creates a thinning look and a relaxed subject.
9 – Show the eyes	Sunglasses hiding the eyes.	Eyes are sharp and focus of the shot.
10 – Editing	No editing, straight out of camera.	Applied the portrait filter from Snapseed App.



Photo of Leila taken by Tim Schaal using the “bad photo” tips to avoid.



Photo of Leila taken by Tim Schaal using the “good photo” tips to use when taking portrait photos.

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