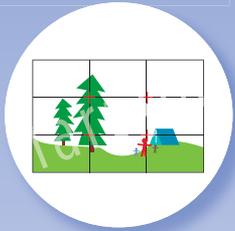




THE ENRICHMENT PROJECT

Badge Program

larajla.com



Digital Photography: Improve Your Photos

You've learned what all those buttons do. You take pictures all the time. Sometimes you're not happy with the final shots. So, let's see about improving your photos.

Make sure your batteries are charged and your card is empty. This is definitely a hands-on badge program.

DIGITAL PHOTOGRAPHY: IMPROVE YOUR PHOTOS

Steps

1. Review your photos.

Review photos that you don't like. Can you explain why you don't like them? Do you know it needs fixed but don't know how? Keep the photos nearby as you work through this badge program and learn to avoid problems in the future.

2. Composition.

If you're taking pictures and you don't have a plan, your photos will reflect that uncertainty. Here are some questions to ask yourself as you plan and take your photos.

- What story am I telling?
- What is the visual focal point (subject) of this shot?
- What competing focal points are there?
- What is in the background and foreground?
- Am I close enough?
- What is the main source of light?
- Is my framing straight?
- What other perspectives could I capture this subject from?
- How would holding the camera in the other format (horizontal / vertical) change this shot?
- How will the eye travel through this image?

Asking yourself these questions will get you looking at the scene before you push the button.

3. Rule of thirds.

The basic principle behind the rule of thirds is to imagine breaking an image down into thirds (both horizontally and vertically) so that you have nine parts. Studies have shown that when viewing images that people's eyes usually go to one of the intersection points naturally rather than the center of the shot. The Rule of Thirds works with this natural way of viewing an image rather than working against it. If you can't picture this, check out the "SUPP_Rule_Thirds.pdf" for a visual grid.

Draw an outline the size of your photo and a grid of three columns high by three columns wide on a sheet of paper. You'll be visualizing this when you take photos.

Experiment with your camera. Take photos with your subject in the center of your image and then using the rule of thirds. Compare the two. How do your eyes travel the photo?



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4. Fill your frame.

Before you click, look around your subject. You want your subject to fill the frame and to eliminate or minimize distracting details. Look around the outside edges of your photo. You don't want large areas of empty space or so much crammed in that your attention will be drawn away from your subject.

Ways to fill your frame include:

- Use your optical zoom (not your digital zoom)
- Use your legs to get closer
- Crop your shots (software)

You can also use elements around your subject to create a frame. Remember, the frame does not have to go completely around your subject. Some items you might try to use for framing include:

- Branches
- Row of trees
- Tunnel
- Fencing
- Windows
- Doorways
- People's shoulders
- Walls or arches

Experiment with frames. If necessary, take a stuffed animal with you. Change your angle and / or height to find different "frames" for your photo. Look at the framed area before you press the button and ask yourself "will the elements (other than your subject) add to or take away from the photo I'm about to take?"

5. Close enough.

Do you need to have every inch of the person in the image? Will cutting out the shoes, legs, etc. really make a difference? If you're too far away, you won't be able to see their face. They'll be lost in the shot.

For example, if your daughter has caught her first fish, why do you need to have the entire pier, fishing pole, family members who accompanied her and the boat in the photo? Instead, zoom in on her face and the fish. The excitement you'll see in her face will be lost in a distant shot. The close shot will tell a better story than the far away one.

Details often are lost when you're far away. This does not only apply to people, but to buildings, collections and more. Practice getting close shots so that you can see the details.

6. Backgrounds.

Don't focus all your concentration on your subject. The background can make or break your photo. You don't want your background to take away from your subject. For example, a tree sticking out of someone's head is very distracting. Review your photos and see where the background takes attention away from your subject. Ask yourself what you could have done to minimize the impact of the background.

Explore various ways to adjust, blur and create your own background to make it less distracting.



7. Changing viewpoint.

Changing your viewpoint can make a dramatic difference to your photos and help reduce background problems. Look at the world through your subject's eyes. Babies and kids see the world differently than adults do. Move to their height and take photos there.

Here are some ways to change your viewpoint. Shoot a single item from a variety of viewpoints to see the difference.

- Lay on the floor
- Shoot down (or up) stairs
- Go beneath an object and shoot up (bridge, tree, etc.)
- Go on a roof or balcony and shoot down
- Climb a tree
- Angle of the shot (rotate your camera slightly or move so that you're not taking a "flat" picture)

8. Using lines.

The most obvious horizontal line you'll deal with is the horizon. Horizontal lines convey a message of "stability" or "rest." Photos of the horizon look best when you shoot these with the widest part of your photo frame running left and right. Unbroken horizons leave your photo dull. Use items in the landscape to break it up. Horizon shots should always be aligned with the frame. Remember to use the rule of thirds — do not put the horizon in the middle of your picture. Practice taking horizon pictures. What other items are horizontal that you can photograph?

Vertical lines convey "power", "strength" and "growth." Photos with vertical lines look best when you shoot these with the widest part of your photo frame running top to bottom. Again, your rule of thirds says not to put the line in the center of your photo. Practice taking vertical line shots like buildings and trees.

Diagonal lines give a sense of action, but placing them in the middle of your image makes it look like you've cut it in half. Practice taking diagonal line shots.

In the case with horizontal and vertical lines, try to keep them aligned with the frame of your photo. Slight angles make them look misaligned. If you want dramatic effect, make sure your angles are enough that it looks like you wanted it that way.

9. Natural light.

Most photographers feel natural light is the most flattering. However the time of day you're using sunlight as your light source has a great deal to do with your photos.

Here are a few tips to use for outside photographs.

- A mix of sun and clouds that makes for the best photographic conditions.
- Overcast days help diffuse the light, creating a pleasant, flattering light.
- Morning light has a slight blue hue to it.
- Midday light is the brightest light of the day, producing the clearest, sharpest photos. However, the light casts a cool, blue cast which is so bright it can blow out the color in your photos.
- The late afternoon is the "golden hour" because afternoon light is soft and gives a warm, golden glow with soft contrasts.
- Light shines at an angle, accentuating your subject's features while casting a flattering glow.
- Snow and sand are both reflective surfaces. They reflect sunlight, fooling the camera sensor into thinking there is more light available than there is.

Practice taking the same shot during different times of the day to see how the changing light affects your photos.



10. Artificial light.

Shooting in dark rooms with your flash will not give you good photos. If you can pose a scene, you can collect lights from your house and position them to eliminate bad shadows. Placing them to the left and right of your subject allows you to light the area without it affecting your camera's automatic sensors. Utilize reflective surfaces such as walls, ceilings and white boards to help diffuse the light.

Play with these light sources to see how they affect your photos.

- Candles
- Holiday tree lights
- Strings of patio lights
- Night lights
- Lamps
- Spotlights
- Clip-on lights
- Specialty lights
- Bonfires
- Fireworks
- Street lights
- Vehicle lights

NOTE: Incandescent lighting can give your photos a yellow or orange cast; fluorescent lights can give a blue or green cast.

11. Shooting portraits.

Have you taken a child to get a portrait shot? An unwilling subject is just the first challenge to taking portrait photos. Here are a few things to be aware of while taking portrait photos.

- Remove as much background as possible
- Be aware of reflective surfaces such as glasses
- Angle your subject to eliminate red-eye
- Fill the frame
- Put your subject at ease
- Natural pose

Read about these items and how to minimize them. Find some tips for great portraits in the supplemental file "SUPP_Stunning Portraits.pdf." Use your knowledge to practice taking portrait photos.

12. Shooting groups.

Shooting groups of people offers unique challenges. You're trying to fit a large group of people in one photo and have them all respond in the same way at the same time.

Here are some tips to explore and use while you practice group shots.

- Be prepared — check your location beforehand, have your equipment ready and know how you're going to pose your subjects
- Assistance — if you have a large group, get assistance so you're not distracted
- Notice before shooting — give a verbal notice that you're going to take the photo in five minutes so everyone can touch up their hair, make-up, etc.
- Lighting — be aware of available lighting and bring extra to eliminate problems
- Take multiple shots — your group will relax as you take more, also taking shots as they try to get into formation can be humorous for them and helpful to you
- Get in close — stagger people instead of lining them up, have them lean their heads together or look for other ways to make your group shot more compact
- Posing — short people in the front, tall in the back and ask everyone to lift their chins a bit
- Keep control — keep talking to the group and let them know what you want them to do, tell them how great they look and explain how many photos you're planning to take



13. **Urban landscapes and buildings.**

Scout out your area before taking pictures. Do a little research and make sure there are no buildings, signs or other items that will be in your shots that are trademarked. If there are, you will need permission to publish your photos. You may have to pay for the privilege. Getting a written release will help protect you.

Walk around your area and decide where you'll take your shots, when you'll take your shots, etc. For example, if an area is extremely busy and you don't want all the people in your shot, getting up very early will allow you to take photos with minimum amount of interference.

Find an urban area to photograph. Watch it for a few days and take photos to document the level of activity, light play and other elements that will affect your photos.

14. **Action shots.**

Can you adjust your camera to do continuous bursts or triple shots? If so, try these features during a game or activity. Is the quality what you want? You may do better learning the timing of your camera. Here are some items to keep in mind when you're taking action shots.

- Stay parallel to the action to hold focus and keep adjustment time to a minimum
- For consistent activities, like track meets, pick a place you want to take shots of your team and practice with others
- Pan shots (tripod and move side to side) to keep subject in frame and background blurred
- Know the sport so you anticipate shots
- Maintain "active space" in front of a moving subject

Try these techniques at a game or activity.

15. **Telling the story.**

To capture a story in a single picture, single shots should be like a headline in a newspaper — the content should be understood immediately. Make sure you have a close-up shot to see strong emotions. Only include background items when they are necessary to your story.

Short stories should be about a single event or theme, but the photos should hold the viewer's attention a little longer. This might be a sporting event, antics of your pet or a kid's party.

Novels are collections of stories that occur over time or over an event that has many parts. You'll have characters and several chapters. Plan what shots you need to tell your story. Make notes of the shots you need to tell your entire story. Before leaving the shoot, review your shots to make sure you have them all.



16. **Software adjustments.**

You've taken your photos, told your story, but it needs a little help. That's where your software and editing abilities are needed. Each program has its own way of doing the following tasks. Open some of your digital photos in your software program and try these tasks to see how your photos improve from a little adjustment.

As you work with your software, you'll become more aware with issues in your photos and will start looking for those when you take your photos.

- Remove red-eye
- Rotation (straighten it)
- Cropping (cutting off distracting items)
- Color adjustment (for natural or unnatural results)
- Blur and sharpen
- Resize

NOTE: Don't forget to save a copy before working with it so your original remains untouched.

Most software programs have tutorials, online courses (free and paid) as well as groups who discuss the programs and help each other. Take the next step and find a group so that you can discuss your software. Expand your knowledge and ability to edit your photos.

Supplements

SUPP_Rule_Thirlds.pdf

Graphic view of the "rule of thirds"

SUPP_Stunning Portraits.pdf

Tips for taking stunning portraits

Sites to Explore

www.tipsfromthetopfloor.com/2006/12/29/welcome-to-tips-from-the-top-floor

www.picturecorrect.com

www.prosphotos.com

www.geofflawrence.com/index.htm

digital-photography-school.com

www.digital-photography-tips.net/index.html

www.makeuseof.com/tag/6-digital-photography-websites-with-free-tutorials

www.makeuseof.com/tag/five-websites-to-learn-a-lot-more-about-photography-and-digital-cameras

www.makeuseof.com/tag/critique-photo-feedback-photography

www.suite101.com/photography

berniesumption.com/photography

beginnersphotographyblog.com

photographycourse.net

mashable.com/2011/05/12/mobile-photography-resources

Check out [Iarajla's Enrichment Project](#) to start your own adventure.