Taking Good Pictures: Part I

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Session Goals

To provide an practical understanding of:

• what are the basic elements of a “GOOD” picture

• how to obtain a “GOOD” Picture
Agenda

• Discussion of what makes a good photograph
• Practical review of the fundamental elements of good photographs
• Summary and final thoughts
Basic Photograph Concepts

• Photography is painting with light
• A picture has two components:
  • Technical Factors
  • Creative Factors
• A controlled combination of these two components creates an image that captures the appearance and emotions the photographer was trying to express
• What is a Good Picture? “I cannot describe it but I know it when I see it!” (Justice Potter Stewart)
Technical Aspects of Good Photography

- Proper Exposure
- Good Lighting
- Good White/Color Balance
- In-Focus
- Image is Sharp
- Minimal Technology “Flaws” (flare, distortion, …)

- Technical factors support the creative elements of photography
Creative Aspects of Good Photography

- Subject
- Background
- Lighting
- Composition
- Perspective
- Action

- The creative elements of a photograph tell “the story” the photographer is capturing
The UNIVERSAL Photographic Constant

- People NOT cameras take pictures
- Cameras are ONLY the tool people use to take pictures
- Good pictures are the result of people controlling how their tools (the camera) work
What is a GOOD Picture?

• A picture that conveys a picture directly and vividly
• A picture I like; that interests me
• A picture I want others to see
• NORMALLY follows certain “rules”
• Sometimes a good photograph breaks all the rules of what is normally considered a good picture
Why Are So Many Pictures BAD?

• Boring
• Confusing
• Technically poor
• The vast majority of bad pictures look alike; most people do not think about the picture they are taking; they just aim center mass, blink, and blast
• If you want people to think you take good pictures, the easiest way is to just **NOT SHOW** the bad ones!
Fundamentals and Suggestions for Good Pictures

1. Show ONE subject clearly
2. Simply the background
3. Try a different viewpoint
4. Place the subject off center
5. Take charge
6. Watch the light
7. Get closer
8. Take extra pictures
9. Vary your subjects
10. Experiment
#1 - Show ONE Subject Clearly

- Understand what is the subject of your picture
- Do not confuse the viewer
- Use objects in the picture to assist the viewer in understanding the subject
- Less is MORE!
#1 - Show ONE Subject Clearly

Dogs too small; tree too large
#1 - Show ONE Subject Clearly

Dogs too small; no need for bowl or people
#2 Simply the Background

- Clutter confuses the viewer as to what is the subject of the picture
- Clutter can ruin the subject’s appearance
- See the whole picture; not just the subject but the subject AND the background
Why is there a tree growing out of the back of this dog?

What is this a picture of?
#2 Simply the Background

A good picture if the second person was missing
#2 Simply the Background

Not Good  ➔  Better
#3 - Try a Different Viewpoint

- Not all pictures work in a horizontal format; try vertical
- Try different camera angles; try taking pictures from close to the ground
- Look for the unusual camera angle
- Try to shoot animals and children at eye level
- Use the background to draw attention to the subject
#3 - Try a Different Viewpoint

Good

Much Better
#3 - Try a Different Viewpoint

Usual

Unusual
#3 - Try a Different Viewpoint

Both unusual
#4 - Place the Subject Off Center

• “Center Mass/Bulls Eye” aiming is for shooting guns NOT pictures
• Don’t let the camera’s autofocus control the image; remember focus lock and shift
• Use the Rule of Thirds
• Use the placement of the subject to help tell the picture’s story
#4 - Place the Subject Off Center

Boring
No context

Better

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#4 - Place the Subject Off Center

Rule of Thirds
Place the subject at one of the intersections
#4 - Place the Subject Off Center
#4 - Place the Subject Off Center

Boring little context

Better
#5 - Take charge

- Do not be afraid to take control; not all good pictures are “as is”
- Think about how you can change the scene to improve the picture
- Plan ahead for the photographic conditions you want
- Be prepared for opportunity; do not react to it
- Luck doesn’t exist! photographic “luck” is opportunity combined with preparation
#5 - Take charge

Something different and more interesting

The “usual” children’s pose; BOORING
#5 - Take charge

Sunset light for glowing color

Early morning for shadows and calm water
#6 - Watch the Light

- Photography is all about light
- Be alert for conditions that can fool the camera’s light meter and auto white balance
- Look for unusual lighting
- Use morning and evening light for dramatic lighting
- Mid-day light is bland and one dimensional
- Watch the shadows and highlights and adjust as needed
- Use flash to fill shadows
Mid-day sunlight is washed out and one-dimensional
#6 - Watch the Light

Storm adds color and shadows
#6 - Watch the Light

Morning light adds color and shadows
#6 - Watch the Light

If only the face was not hidden in shadow

Better
#7 - Get Closer

- Consider the size of the subject in relation to the background
- Even fixed focal length lens cameras have a “telephoto setting” (it’s called move closer)
- “Digital Zoom” is not the same as a zoom lens
- Know how close your camera will focus
- Always try to “get closer”
#7 - Get Closer

Close

Closer
#7 - Get Closer

Close

Closer
#8 – Take Extra Pictures

- Bracket the exposure to help get a “good” exposure
- It’s easier to take an extra picture than to recreate the picture at a later date
- Do NOT assume the picture is “perfect”; take extra pictures as insurance and to improve the chances that you got the image you wanted
#8 – Take Extra Pictures

If the only picture you took was the last one, would you be happy?
#9 - Vary Your Subjects

- Do not always take the same pictures
- Do not always take the same subjects
- Give yourself assignments of new picture/subject combinations in order to learn to photograph them
- Try something new even when taking pictures of what you do well
- Improving your skills will improve even those pictures you shoot well!
#10 – Experiment

- Not every picture is a work of art
- Break the “rules”
- Do not get in a rut; try to do things differently
- Set goals, take notes and use the data capture capability of digital cameras to review your work and make improvements
- Practice DOES NOT make perfect. Practice, critical analysis, and corrective action makes perfect
- Photography is a skill; a skill is KNOWLEDGE reinforced with EXPERIENCE
#9 – Vary your Subjects & 
#10 - Experiment 

Using dogs to learn how to photograph action and animals
Fundamentals and Suggestions for Good Pictures

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Summary

• Cameras are tools and the resulting pictures are only as good as the user of the tool

• The “rules and tips” are GUIDELINES to avoid the usual ‘bulls-eye” and mug-shot format so common to most bad pictures

• Sorting your pictures and not showing the bad ones will help you learn how to take better pictures and make everyone think that all your pictures are good
Reference Material

• Kodak has absolutely great reference material on-line
• Go to www.kodak.com and in the search box type “top ten tips for great pictures”
• The first link will take you to a html presentation and the second will take you to a flash presentation
• The html presentation has links to more detailed information should you wish to go into more depth on a given topic
• The link to the html presentation is: http://www.kodak.com/eknec/PageQuerier.jhtml?pq-locale=en_US&pq-path=10032#wg02_1_title_1
Final Thoughts

• If you do not like the picture, its doubtful anyone else will
• A technically good picture with awful composition is a bad picture and a technically bad picture with good composition is a bad picture. You MUST do both well to get a good picture!
• Learn how your digital camera works so that its features do not prevent you from getting a good picture
• Most pictures are boring; make yours unusual so that they get the viewer’s attention
• Its easy to throw away the extra picture you took but did not turn out. You do not have the picture you did not take
• Good Photography is like the question, “how do you get to Carnegie Hall? Practice, Practice, Practice!”
Questions, Comments, or Suggestions?

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# Schedule
(2nd Saturday of every Month)

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Description</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>7-14-07</td>
<td>Digital Camera Picture Taking (how to get a good digital image)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8-11-07</td>
<td>Digital Camera Picture Taking Part II (more how to get a good digital image)</td>
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<td>9-8-07</td>
<td>TBD</td>
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<tr>
<td>10-13-07</td>
<td>NEW Series  Photoshop Fundamentals by Ed Bunyan</td>
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