**Basic tips to improve your photography**

This guide is for users of compact or DSLR cameras – not mobile phone – please avoid using them if you can help it.

Taking better photos require understanding of both basic rules of Photography and also a bit of digital technology.

DSLR cameras and most of compact cameras have several programmes for different type of photography. I’ll try to explain some of them:

**Exposure**

Creating a properly exposed image in photography depends on interdependence between three elements:

**ISO** – the measure of a digital camera sensor’s sensitivity to light

**Aperture or F-stop**– the size of the opening in the lens when a picture is taken

**Shutter Speed** – the amount of time that the shutter is open to allow light in.

In order to get the correct combination of these elements each camera has an In camera **light meter,** which helps us to determine the correct relations between

these elements. The light meter measure the light that is reflected from a surface and thus determine the setting required for a correct exposure.

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**M – or Manuel** - you have full control on the camera – you can choose the preferred F-stop (Usually between f2.8 – f-22), shutter speed (usually from 30 sec – 1/8000 sec in good DSLR cameras) and ISO (sensitivity to light). To create correctly exposed images you need to control these three variables.

**Auto** – if you can’t be bothered with all the technical stuff – let the camera do it for you. Auto will choose for you the best combination of F-stop, shutter speed and ISO for the optimal exposure.

Some consumer level DSLR have several other programmes that can help you be more creative with your camera.

**Portrait** – (a face icon on Canon system) – gives priority to most available open aperture in order to create sallow depth of field.

**Sports** – (a runner icon on Canon system) – gives priority to higher shutter speed in order to freeze movement.

**Landscape** - gives priority to most available close aperture in order to create optimum depth of field.

**Lighting**

Photography is often described as ‘painting with light’. Understanding how light sources and light direction can really improve your photography.

When photographing a subject using natural light, try to position yourself close to the direction of the light source, ideally at 45 degrees to the subject. If you shoot outdoor, try to avoid direct sunlight, look for a shaded area, a tree or a under a canopy or a roof. Do not position your subject in direct sun. If there is no shade available, position your subject/s with their back to the sun at 45 degrees. The get a correct exposure in a situation like that, take a reading of the light close-up on your subject’s face and set your camera manually to these values, or just manually increate the exposure by about to 2 stops (most cameras will give you this option) In order to overcome the bright background.

This will prevent you from getting an image were the sky are properly exposed but your subjects are under-exposed

**Shooting indoor**

When shooting indoor during the day, in a room with enough natural light, try to position yourself between the light source (a window) and your subject at about 45 degrees. If you have to shoot against a bright window – there are two things you can do to prevent your image to be properly exposed for the window while your subject is dark and underexposed (your camera light meter is measuring the strong light that is comes from the window and determine the camera exposure accordingly) – one option is to increase the exposure manually, the same way we did when shooting outdoor with a bright background; second option is to use a flashgun to add light to the subjects which will balance the light coming from the window.

**Shooting indoor with a flashgun**

Most cameras have a built-in flash, which gives awful results (but better then nothing). Direct flash gives a very harsh unflattering lighting. If you do a lot of indoor photography, it would be useful to acquire an external flashgun (£40 - £80 will get you a decent enough one). When shooting in a room with not to high ceiling, aim your flash, by swivel it around, at the ceiling behind you, at 45 degrees. The light will bounce; create a more soft, flattering light. Make sure the ISO is at lease at 400 or 800 and the F-stop is about f4.

**Composition**

Once we mastered the skills to achieve an image with the right exposure, we can look at the more creative side of photography. One of the main elements in creating a good composition is the Golden Ratio, which has been used as a powerful composition tool for centuries. The Golden Ratio It is a design principle based on the ratio of 1 to 1.618, also known as the rule of 2/3.

The best way to apply the Golden Ratio is to divide your image in your mind into three equal parts vertically and horizontally. When placing your subject in your view finder, try to position it on the 1/3 – 2/3 line, horizontally or vertically, depends on your camera orientation. By positioning the subject this way, you will create an image that has a strong composition, which will attract viewers to your photograph.

The Golden ratio apply both to portraits or landscape – when shooting a portrait you should aim to place the subject eyes about third from the top. The same rule apply when photographing a group – make sure to position the group faces more or less on the 2/3 horizontal line.

**Portraits** – full length, ¾ length and close-up. Portraits of people are usually divided into these three categories. Full length – shows the entire body with enough space at the bottom and the top. ¾ length – the body is cut somewhere above the knees – trying if possible not to cut other limbs, especially hands. Again, keeping with the rule of the third – placing the face on the line between the middle and top third and leave enough space above the head (also not more then third). Close-up or Head & Shoulder – shows mainly the face, top of the chest and shoulders.