25 Top Tips for Better Photography

Preview

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Top Tip 1

Understand f Numbers

The aperture is the hole through which light enters the camera. Its size is given by f numbers which can enable you to control how much light enters the camera for a certain exposure. The smaller the f number, the larger the aperture. So if you want to let more light enter the camera you use a smaller f number. If you want to cut down the amount of light you use a higher f number. Useful because all f numbers are identical regardless of the focal length of a lens, so f/16 on a 50mm lens admits the same amount of light as f/16 on a 300mm lens.

Top Tip 2

Understand Shutter Speed

Controls how long the shutter is held open. This is called the exposure time. Slower shutter speeds let in more light, fast shutter speeds let in less light. For high light levels you generally want to use a fast shutter speed. For low light levels, use a slow shutter speed. Also use a fast shutter speed to capture a frozen image of movement. Use a slow shutter speed to record movement as a blur.

Top Tip 3

Understand ISO

ISO rating is the sensitivity of a sensor to light and is named after the International Standards Organization. Lower ISO means less sensitive to light. So a lower ISO rating will need more exposure to produce an image. A higher ISO setting will mean the sensor is more sensitive to light and so a shorter exposure will be needed to produce the same image. When the ISO is doubled the sensor requires half as much exposure, and when you halve the ISO the sensor needs twice as much light. For example, if your camera suggested an exposure of 1/250sec at f/4 at ISO200, at ISO 100 exposure would be 1/125sec at f/4, and at ISO 400 it would be 1/500sec at f/4.

A digital camera's sensor should be left at its lowest ISO rating (usually 100-200) for maximum imager quality. Use higher ISO settings when working in low light or when trying to freeze motion. As ISO increases, so does the amount of noise in the image.

Top Tip 4

Know Your Camera

Perhaps the biggest temptation when you get a new camera is to start taking pictures as soon as possible. However your photography will benefit greatly from an understanding of your camera's features. Unfortunately this usually means wading through an uninspiring manual. Often there is a quick start section. You can read this first and take a few shots, but don't forget to return to the manual to find out what else your camera is capable of. Familiarize yourself with how to adjust settings, and activate functions and special modes. Become familiar with your camera's menus so that you can quickly change settings so you are ready to capture any shot.

Once you feel you know how to set up your camera take some experimental shots, keeping a record of the settings you used. This exercise will show you how the various functions and settings can change the images you produce.

Top Tip 5

Control Depth of Field

Depth of field is the area in front of and behind the point your camera focuses on that is also in focus. Large depth of field means there is a large area in focus; small depth of field means only a small area is in focus. You will probably want to use different depths of field for different types of shot. If you want an image to draw attention to one object, as in a portrait shot, you will want a small depth of field. This will blur the background and emphasize the model. However for a landscape shot you will probably want a large depth of field to keep everything in focus.

The aperture, the focal length of the lens, and the distance between the camera, the subject and the background, determine depth of field. Aperture is the most important factor that controls depth of field. A wide aperture (low f number) reduces depth of field; a small aperture (high f number) increases it. If possible set your camera to aperture priority. This means you can set the aperture and the camera will automatically select the appropriate shutter speed. If depth of field is not important in an image select a mid-range aperture for the best color saturation.

At any aperture using a lens of shorter focal length gives greater depth of field. A longer focal length gives a smaller depth of field.

Lastly, the further the camera is from the subject, the greater the depth of field.