



Digital Photography Terminology and Tips

Introduction

Thanks to inexpensive cameras and easy editing software like iPhoto, anyone can learn digital photography. This document will review some basic principles of digital photography to help you make the most of your digital camera and get the best possible pictures.

Settings

Depending on the model of camera you own, there are a few common settings that can be changed:

- **ISO** controls the camera's sensitivity to light. Higher ISO lets you shoot in lower light, but this comes at the expense of grainier photos. Normally you should leave it on "standard" or "automatic" unless it's too dark to get a usable photo.
- **Macro** mode lets you focus on subjects very close to the lens. Used for shooting small objects or extreme close-ups.
- **Optical Zoom** physically adjusts the lens to zoom in on the subject as is done in film cameras. Preferable to digital zoom.
- **Digital Zoom** enlarges and crops the photo to simulate a longer telephoto lens, but severely reduces the quality of your photo. Equivalent to enlarging on a photocopier.
- **Flash** is typically enabled automatically in low-light settings. This makes the scene bright enough to capture without needing a long exposure time.
- **Resolution or Quality:** All digital cameras can be adjusted to save their photos at different resolutions. Higher resolution means greater detail, but also takes more space on the memory card. If think you might ever want to print or crop your photos, you will probably want to select the highest resolution that your camera is capable of using.
- **JPEG or RAW:** High-end cameras (primarily models with interchangeable lenses) allow you to select JPEG, RAW or both as the file format. RAW files are significantly larger and can result in better quality images when processed with advanced tools like Photoshop or Aperture. However, they will make very little difference for most users.

Angles and Perspective

- If you and your subject are standing facing each other be sure to hold the camera at your **subject's eye level**, not your own. This is particularly important to remember if you are photographing young students who are shorter than yourself.
- Try **high or low angles:** Photograph your subject from above (perhaps using a chair or ladder to elevate yourself) or below

(sitting or kneeling on the floor) for a more dramatic, powerful appearance.

- **Zoom in or out** depending on whether the surroundings are relevant. If you simply want a portrait of a person, zoom in tight and eliminate as much background clutter as possible. If surroundings are important (such as a student working with peers in a class) zoom out to show more of the environment.
- Use the **rule of thirds:** Don't always center your subjects in the photo. Try placing them in the left, right, upper, or lower third of the image for a more artistic shot.
- Get a mix of **candid and posed shots.** It can be tempting to have your subjects turn and smile for the camera, but be sure you get candid photos as well. If you are photographing an event or activity, candid shots can be better for setting the scene.

Lighting Ideas

- **Avoid the flash:** Try disabling your flash and rest the camera on a steady surface. This lets you take a longer exposure in low light without resulting in a blurry photo. The lighting will appear more even and natural without a flash.
- Try to use **natural lighting.** During the daytime, open blinds and minimize overhead lights for a more even, natural look.
- **Shoot with the light, not against it:** If the sun or another bright light source is behind your subject, they will be silhouetted. Unless you are trying to achieve that effect, it will be harder to get a good photo. Move yourself and/or your subject so they are lit from the front or side depending on what effect you want to achieve. If the subject is wearing a hat, take it off or tilt their head to avoid shading their face.

Other Tips

- **Take more photos:** A great benefit of digital is that there is no wasted film and no development cost. There's no harm in taking a few extra shots to help get the perfect picture.
- **Review your photos** as you take them. One of the great things about digital photography is that you have the opportunity to quickly look at the photos you just captured and see if you need to retake any.
- Make sure you have **permission** to publish photos of your subjects. If you are taking pictures in school, check with teachers or the secretary to make sure there are not media restrictions on any of the students that can be identified in your photos.