



30 Steps to Become a More Successful Photographer

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Introduction

Are you a photographer with very little experience?

Have you been shooting for years, but want to progress beyond the beginner's stage?

Do you have dreams of becoming a professional?

Whatever success you want to achieve in photography, this PhotographyTalk.com e-book was written for you. For the vast majority of photographers in the world, success is generally defined as understanding your camera and basic

photography concepts, and then using them to take better photos than you did previously. For a very small percentage of photographers, success is becoming a full-time professional who is able to make a living from photography.

The important point to remember is that all photographers, even the most famous in the world, had to start from the same place...and this PhotographyTalk.com e-book presents 30 of the steps you must take to enjoy and succeed at photography, whether you simply want to take better pictures of your family and friends or you seriously aspire to become a professional.

Fortunately for you, millions of photographers have already taken these (and other) steps, and proven that they are critical to being successful. Of course, success is never guaranteed, regardless of whether you follow in the exact footsteps of the most successful photographers; however, the steps you'll read in this e-book are sure to provide you with many opportunities to enjoy photography more and experience a significant improvement in the photos you take.

Chapter 1: Find Your Passion



An early step in experiencing success as a photographer is to find your passion. What subject matter interests you the most? What challenges are you prepared to face?

You may prefer the controlled environment of a studio or a similar setting, where understanding and utilizing highly technical methods drive your passion.

You may like to be among people in an active environment, such as city streets or events, where you must develop photojournalistic skills to capture what is happening spontaneously, with little or no control of the situation.

Your passion may be the great outdoors, photographing adventure sports, such as climbing, mountain biking, etc., or hiking into rugged, backcountry areas for spectacular landscapes and wildlife.

Few, if any, photographers are able to excel at all major types of photography, but you should certainly give most of them a try, since there is no better way to discover which moves you the most and allows you to be most creative.

Another method to help you find your passion is to approach photography creatively in one of three ways. All of these approaches are equal, in that they are not a progression from beginner to advanced, although you can use them as a way to expand your photography experience, which should, in turn, improve your skills. Each approach serves a different mindset and perception of photography as a hobby, an interest, an art form or a profession, so each is right and correct.

The Casual Approach

For many photographers, a digital camera, especially compacts, are “lifestyle” devices. The camera’s purpose is to record regular events in people’s lives and the lives of family members, friends, co-workers, and even the strangers they meet. After all, the popularity of photography, and then digital photography, has been driven by the goal to make the camera affordable and easy to use for the “everyman” and “everywoman.” Many are perfectly satisfied with this “snapshot” approach; and this group constitutes the majority of people who own a camera.

The Purposeful Approach

A second approach that describes another, and smaller, group of photographers can be called “purposeful” photography. These photographers don’t “take” pictures like the casual photographer, but “produce” photos, meaning they take as much control of the scene or subject and the process of recording an image as possible. They have a pre-determined notion of what kind of photography they want to shoot today and the kind of images that would like to bring home. It’s almost a hunter’s mentality: great pictures of the sunset, marvelous images of hummingbirds or interesting urban landscapes are waiting for you, the photographer; you just have to bag them!

Goal-oriented photographers have developed the technical skills and camera and lens knowledge, so they can combine them in the right proportions to come as close to the target images they had in mind. They’re able to evaluate the shooting environment to decide the best location for the camera, the lights, etc., and then make the subtle adjustments to exposure settings and other functions and technical details.

The Zen Approach

There is a third approach, however, which is where pure creativity is most likely to occur. It shares some elements of Zen, in that the idea is to forget any objectives or rigid plans, empty your mind and just accept whatever the world offers in terms of images to record. This is often when the most amazing experiences occur that would have never happened if you were photographing like a hunter. To utilize this third approach, you must change your mindset from one of deduction, or problem solving, to one of discovery. When you act as a discoverer, you are likely to find much more than a searcher, who thinks he or she knows what there is to find.

Part of this discovery process is freeing yourself from time: Leave your cell phone and watch at home. It is also about space: focusing all of your attention on the space where you are now. Sit in a field; stroll slowly past a quiet stream; stand on a busy street corner. The environment is not as important as being able to see it as a whole, without your mind categorizing or describing the elements within it.

Although the camera still makes a technical contribution to photography of this third approach, it is totally objective, unable to record the scene or subject as anything more than what is placed before it. The key for photographers of the third approach is to develop the eye and mind to “see” only what the camera frames. Those great photos are there, but unlike the hunter pursuing his goal, these photographers wait for the pictures to come them, to present themselves only when the photographer ceases to look for them in a conventional manner.

Maybe, the greatest benefit of dissecting photography into these three approaches is that those photographers who aspire to the challenge of the second or third approach gain greater skill and the eye to shoot the next group of casual snaps during the holidays or at someone’s birthday party with more creativity.

Chapter 2: Make a Plan

People who are successful—in business, in life or in photography—have learned the best way to experience success is to set goals, and then develop a plan to reach those goals. The reason why a plan is so important is that the success you want to achieve and experience is in the future: Little or none of it is happening today, or even tomorrow. Typically, those people who are less successful dwell on past or present events, obstacles and problems, wasting their time and brainpower worrying about why they didn't act differently or why the world seems to be against them.



Conversely, anyone who has succeeded and wants more is focused on the future and what steps he or she must take to make it a reality. People who live in and for the future are often much happier than people who wallow in past mistakes and seem confused about how to change their mindset. The best of these future-oriented people are not just living a fantasy; they are actively involved in being the catalyst, the driver, of the changes required to be successful.

A very practical method to develop a success strategy for the future is to write the date at the top of a piece of paper (or on a computer screen) five years hence. It is now 2018, 2019, whenever. How would you define the best kind of success and happiness you can envision for yourself, your career, your photography, your family or whatever, at that future date? Do you aspire to have total command of your camera's features and functions? Do you want to learn and experience much more about a specific photography genre? Do you want a photography Website? Do you want to "graduate" to a DSLR, or a better DSLR? Do you want to be able to sell your photography, at least on a part-time basis? Do you want to attend a photography school to obtain a degree or certification? Do you envision yourself as a full-time professional, operating your own

business?

How would you want your personal life to change? A bigger house? Saving more money and maximizing your retirement plan? More time for travel? What kind of success would you want for your spouse, children? Be as specific as possible as you list the answers to these and other questions. This first step is to create as concrete and as complete a vision as possible of your ideal situation five years in the future. Amazingly, just doing this exercise will help you forget about the past and adopt a more positive outlook.

Your piece of paper or computer document now represents a list of goals you expect to reach five years in the future. The next step in the process is to use the present to make the changes and redirect your efforts and energy that start you on the path to your ideal future.

It's often easiest to start with a number, such as taking five more of the steps in this e-book every year, or every six months. For example, during the next year, you will learn how to use depth-of-field to shoot better portraits. Three years from today, you'll own your first DSLR. During the next four years, you'll earn a photography degree. At some future date, you'll have sufficient skills and equipment to make money with your camera. Five years from today, you'll quit your current job and/or career and go full-time as a professional.

Then, you want to write the smaller steps you'll take tomorrow, next week or next month or during the next 90 days to move forward gradually and steadily. As you work through your timeline, note your little successes because they will provide you with positive motivation and reinforcement to make the next small step. At least temporarily, forget about your big goal and just focus on the one immediately in front of you. With this approach, you won't become frustrated and stressed that your ultimate goal seems so far in the future. The idea is to be always experiencing some success, even if it is a very small amount.

Now that you know exactly what you must do to create a successful future, it's simply a matter of taking action on each step. Use your document to record the exact date you reach your small goals and describe what it feels like to be a success, living and working with the end in mind.

Chapter 3: Be One with Your Camera

Regardless of what kind of camera you already own or plan to buy, learn all of its features and capabilities thoroughly, so you're never asking yourself, "I wonder what this button does?" or "What does that symbol mean on the menu?"

The first source of this knowledge is your camera's manual, which just may be the most important item in the box with your camera. You wouldn't believe how many photographers never read a manual thoroughly. It's one of the most common mistakes of both beginner and hobbyist photographers. You'll demonstrate your seriousness about becoming a better photographer if you are one of the few that actually spend quality time with your camera's manual. It is the textbook of your camera.

You may have avoided your camera's manual because it was so easy to take the camera from the box, switch on the Auto mode and just start pointing and clicking at family members, friends, events, scenes, etc. It's certainly OK to do that to become initially familiar with your camera, but you shouldn't stop there.

This e-book can't describe and explain the various features and pieces and parts of every camera in the marketplace, although many are similar. Only the manual that was written for your specific camera brand and model has exact information about how your camera functions and where the buttons, dials, etc. are located that allow you to select and control those functions.

Ultimately, there is no better investment of your time to learn how your camera works. Even if you haven't bought a camera yet, many manuals are available online, so you can read/scan a few to help you know your camera before you buy it. If you're stumped by anything you read in the manual, then ask for help on the PhotographyTalk Forum, as there are sure to be fellow photographers with the same camera, and more experience with it.

It may remind you of schoolwork, but the best method for learning from your manual is to start at the beginning and work through every page. You don't have to read all of it during one session...you didn't do that with textbooks and shouldn't with your camera manual. Yes, you're itching to shoot with your camera, but be patient. Follow these four steps and your knowledge will increase quicker; and when you do start shooting, you won't be fumbling with your camera, but capturing better images almost immediately.

1. Read each specific entry in the manual.
2. Find that feature or control on the camera and study it carefully.
3. Refer back to the manual to check that you've interpreted each camera function correctly.
4. Once you've spent a reasonable amount of time with the manual, plan a photo session with the sole purpose of using most of the major functions. Don't worry too much about the pictures you take; instead, focus mostly on locating the various buttons and controls, and then activating them to see what happens. It's nearly impossible to enjoy photography or capture interesting and creative images until you know how to operate your camera.

Finally, to be truly one with your camera, grasshopper, you must learn how to hold it and eventually be able to put your hands and fingers in the proper positions at a moment's notice without thinking about them.

- Typically, you grasp your camera with both hands, with your last three fingers wrapped around the front to hold it securely.
- Often, the index finger of your left hand is also used to keep a good grip on your camera. Some cameras will have buttons, dials, etc. on the left side of the body that you control with your left hand's index finger, but setting them is generally a quick movement, and then you can return your index finger to the body.

- Other than holding your camera, your left hand's primary purpose is to focus or change lens settings when you operate it manually.
- Your right hand is the most important, as the exposure settings, white balance, shutter release and other controls are typically located on the top right of the camera body and/or the right back next to the LCD screen. You should practice reaching for these controls without looking for them, so you can “program” your fingers to move precisely to the right positions.
- When you use your camera in the portrait orientation, turning the body 90 degrees, you want your left hand below the body, acting as a good support, with your left arm's elbow tucked against the front of your body. Your right hand is above in essentially the same position as in a horizontal orientation to control the various functions.

Chapter 4: Learn Photography Techniques

Once you've worked through every page in your camera's manual and are familiar with your camera's controls, features and functions, you're ready to experiment and practice with it until you're able to manipulate its features to produce the best photos possible.

It's important to understand that as you experiment and practice what you've learned about your camera and the techniques below that one of the benefits of being a photographer is that bad photos are not failures—they are opportunities to improve.



Even the best photographers in the world are constantly evaluating their work; so don't just delete the bad images, study them and jot a few notes about what you did wrong and determine what you can do correct those mistakes. Then, shoot the same photos, so you can compare the old and new to recognize what you did better. Use this process whenever you practice any photographic techniques; your skills and results are likely to improve quicker. The satisfaction of learning from your mistakes will generate as much enjoyment from photography as taking better pictures.

There is nothing wrong with using your camera's auto modes; but to be a true photographer, you must also rely on yourself and your brain—it's much better than the one in your camera. It's important, therefore, to know how to operate your camera manually; and not only understand

technical camera and compositional concepts, but also how to use them. Some of these include:

- The Exposure Equation: lens aperture, shutter speed and ISO and their relationship to each other.
- How Your Camera Reads Light: at the most basic level, a photograph is a record of the light striking the subjects and scenes in front of your camera, so you must be thoroughly knowledgeable in the use and manipulation of light.
- Focus: operating both the auto-focus system and manually focusing a lens.
- Color: in photography, color is actually about the temperature of light.
- Depth of Field: understand how to manipulate that portion of an image that appears in focus and use depth-of-field to

create interesting compositions.

- Rule of Thirds: the positioning of a photo's primary and secondary subject matter within the frame of the image.
- Bokeh: controlling the quality of the blur of the background of a photo to give it more three-dimensionality.

You'll find many different resources at PhotographyTalk.com to help you learn all the photography techniques that will help you become a better photographer.

One of the best places to start is PhotographyTalk's Free Lessons. We've created three sets of lessons for beginner and intermediate photographers based on our most popular articles and Forum videos. You'll make the most of your investment in your camera and your love of photography when you invest some of your time in PhotographyTalk FREE Lessons. The page on the site is <http://www.photographytalk.com/terms-of-use?id=3086>.

You'll also find all of the most important photography techniques clearly explained in the many photography books that PhotographyTalk recommends. Our friend, Bryan Peterson, offers one of the most comprehensive, popular and proven libraries of photography books that have ever been written. You'll benefit the most from the guidance of Bryan and many other world-renown instructors and photographers when you read books from more than one author. The multiple perspectives of their knowledge and experience will provide you with a well-rounded education.

PhotographyTalk invites you to visit our many vendor partners that offer online photography courses, classroom instruction, certification programs and even four-year degrees in photography, which should be seriously considered if you aspire to a professional career.

As you work through the learning curve of photography techniques, you can also turn to the PhotographyTalk Forum where thousands of experienced photographers, including professionals, are eager to help you understand any concept, and provide constructive critiques of your images and specific guidance to improve them.

Chapter 5: Learn Editing Techniques

The "digital" part of digital photography is not just in the camera. It's also in your computer and the photo editing software you use to correct and manipulate your images. If you're new to digital photography, then you may think that learning photo editing software is difficult and time-consuming and the products are expensive. Of course, Photoshop™ has long been the first choice of pros and graphic designers, but Lightroom is also well-respected software that costs less and is a bit easier to learn than Photoshop. As a beginner or hobbyist, you are likely to find all the features you'll ever need in much easier and affordable software.

The one photo editing software that has become very popular is GIMP, or GNU Image Manipulation Program. The primary reasons for its popularity is that it is free, easy to learn and use, duplicates all the Photoshop features you'll ever need, automates many of its functions, is customizable and takes very little room on your hard drive. GIMP is also compatible with Photoshop files and doesn't require the many mouse clicks through the multiple levels of a single Photoshop function.



What many new digital photographers like best about GIMP is that they don't have to read a 1,000-page manual or view hours of tutorials to start to see results. The tutorials on the GIMP Website are short and easy to understand, and you'll quickly apply what you've learned.

- Image scaling – Change the size of your image.
- Cropping – Adjust the width and height of your raw digital photos.
- Image mode – Alter your photo from RGB to grayscale.
- Image Specs – Read complete image details.
- Flip and rotate – Correct a photo or create a new one.

GIMP also includes advanced features to manipulate photography that are also easy to learn.

- Custom Brush – Create brushes for specific uses.
- Sepia Toning – Give your photos the classic look before the invention of color photography.
- Exposure Blending – Correct your underexposed or overexposed pictures.
- Selective Color – Highlight specific portions of a black-and-white image with color.
- Smart Sharpening – Control the brightness of your digital photos.

You can download a free copy of GIMP from its Website at <http://www.gimp.org>. It should download and be ready to use in a few hours. Once it's installed, click on the GIMP icon to open the software. You'll see a toolbox on your desktop that will guide you through the first steps of working with a photo.

GIMP is a good starting place for new digital photographers, especially because it's free and easy to learn. Plus, it will continue to provide you with all the features and functions you need as you grow as a photographer, so you can apply advanced editing techniques to your photos.

Correcting common mistakes

The best reason for learning editing techniques is that you'll be able to correct some of the mistakes you'll make as a beginner or intermediate photographer. Even the pros use editing software to correct flaws to their images that occur during shooting.

Every family has photos with one or more family members or friends whose eyes aren't open, or vacation images with some members missing or looking off camera. Instead of deleting these images or being constantly reminded that you've missed many of the photographs you wanted to take, use photo-editing software to fix them. It's now relatively easy to arrange a pleasing family grouping using separate images, with all eyes opened and looking at the camera.

Another common error is insufficient light on the subject, which leave photos dark. In many cases, the best solution would have been to use fill flash when taking the photo; however, the image can still be corrected with photo-editing software.

There may be any number of reasons to change the color of a subject's clothing, the background or other elements of a photo. Maybe, you shot a family portrait and only after you viewed the image did you realize that the color of someone's

shirt clashes with the color of the walls in the room.

It's rare for anyone to have perfect skin. That's why there are so few super-models. You should expect your family members and friends to have blemishes and other facial or skin imperfections that they would rather not see in family photo albums, especially in close-ups. Knowing how to use editing techniques will make them happy you took their picture.

Red-eye is an effect that causes people's pupils to reflect red; in pets, it's known as green-eye. Once the effect is registered on an image, however, you'll need photo-editing software to fix it. Red-eye is one of the mistakes that are quite easy to fix in the software bundled with your camera or simple editing software.

Chapter 6: Become a Videographer



For casual photographers and hobbyists and enthusiasts, video recording has been generally considered secondary to shooting still images until advancements in technology made it easy to share videos either via the Internet and social media or by connecting a camera directly to a HDTV. Now, many people with a digital camera shoot as much video as stills because it provides the addition of motion and sound to record events in one's life and share them with essentially anyone.

Initially, serious amateurs and semi-pro and professional photographers showed little interest in the video capabilities on their intermediate or high-end DSLRs because many (if not most) had come from a still photography background. They viewed video as a nice function for casual photographers, but it wasn't a service that professionals' clients requested. At a professional level, wedding photographers were probably the first who realized they could offer both still and video services, instead of seeing some of their clients' money going to a separate videographer.

Now, professional photographers have a new understanding of the commercial and creative opportunities that video provide. Some cameras are now capable of broadcast quality video, so more photographers can broaden their client services, become documentary videographers and even venture into motion picture production.

Even if you're not a professional photographer, video offers you an equally exciting creative palette, especially if you apply what you've learned from still photos and the special features of video. The following tips will help you become a well-rounded visual creator.

It's still about telling a story

Telling a story in a single image challenges many beginner photographers; however, video may be an opportunity to understand, practice and excel at this technique, whether the story you want to tell is a family event or a documentary of your travels. The principle is the same: Find and capture the visual elements that first attract viewers, and then guide them through the message you want to communicate.

Camera setup

Some of the exposure and shooting settings for video are identical or similar to shooting stills and some are specific to motion photography.

Aperture remains essential the same as still photography; however, today's fast lenses allow you to select wide apertures, so

you can utilize a shallow depth of field for more creativity.

The use of ISO doesn't change, being set to the value that aperture and shutter speed dictates.

When selecting a shutter speed for video, forget about 1/30th or slower; instead, calculate an exposure formula with 1/50th as optimum.

It may be common to rely on auto white balance when shooting still photos; however, with video, you want to know how to adjust it manually, and then check it between each video sequence, so white balance is consistent.

Frame rate is a shooting setting that is exclusive to video and different than the shutter speed. To emulate the look of film-based movies, you should select 24 frames per second, which matches well with a 1/50th shutter speed.

Video shoot planning

Although it's a good idea to have in mind the kind of images you want to capture before shooting still photos, pre-production planning is even more important for good, efficient video creativity. You may not have to develop a detailed storyboard of your video sequences as a professional would, but the storytelling quality of your final production will benefit greatly from some prior planning. You want a clear understanding of the beginning, middle and end of your story, and then shoot more than one video sequence for each part of your story from various angles, positions and distances from your subject, etc.

The addition of sound

Video is not just visual, but also auditory; so part of your planning should include some consideration of what kind of soundtrack is appropriate for your video. With a nature shoot, you certainly want to capture ambient sound of animals, wind and weather, for instance. The same goes for a video story of your child's sports team game. You want to record the sounds that match the action. You may also want sequences without ambient sound and use music only to help emphasize drama and/or emotion. Depending on the complexity of your production, you may need a better microphone than what comes on your camera and an external audio recorder too. Fortunately, these can be rented at affordable rates.

Editing is key

Although editing, or post-production, is an essential stage of still photography, it is even more critical to the final look of your video. If you've planned carefully and shot a sufficient number of video clips and recorded the right audio, and correctly, then much of the creativity of a video production occurs in the editing process.

Educate yourself

Although you may shoot video with the same camera as still images, it can be a rather different creative and production process, as the tips above suggest. You will find it very useful to attend a video production workshop or complete an online course that will teach you the specific techniques to help you become as accomplished as a videographer as you are a successful photographer.

Chapter 7: Develop a Photographer's Eye and Mind

Once you acquire the true mindset of a photographer, you can shoot excellent pictures with the most limited equipment. Developing a photographer's eye and mind is similar to what an accomplished painter or sculptor is able to do, which is to "see" the image of what they want to create in their heads, and then create it.

Developing a photographer's eye and mind begins with a bit of brain science. It is known that the two sides of the human brain work quite differently. The left half of the brain is for analyzing, following processes and procedures and conducting life in a step-by-step manner. The right half of the brain is the creative, intuitive portion, which is obviously very important to succeeding as a photographer.

The challenge for most people is that approximately 88 percent of the population of the world tends to be very left brained. The source of this tendency is typically how you were taught to cope with the world by your parents and the educational system. Parents, because they were similarly instructed as children, strive to position their children within the range of what is considered "normal." Normal, however, is the same as being in the middle of the road: average, safe, but unexceptional.

You may need left-brain capabilities to make your way through life everyday, but as a photographer, you want to be able to switch to your right brain to think and produce creatively. The following tips and exercises will help you become more observant, think with your right brain and shoot the great photos that were always there.



You won't need your camera; in fact, it could be a distraction because these techniques are meant to train your eye to look at a scene as your camera does. Once you acquire this skill, you'll know you have a picture that deserves to be taken, and your camera will simply record what your trained eye found.

Composition

Go for a series of walks in your neighborhood as well as totally different environments: urban, suburban, rural, backcountry, mountains, the sea, etc. Find an angle on a scene that you think would make a good photo. Close your eyes and then re-open them. If the scene still attracts your interest, drives your emotions or tells a compelling story as it did at first, then that's a picture you should take. The more times you do this exercise, and in different places and different times of the day, the more you'll train your eyes.

Next, try a dimensional exercise. Because you have two eyes, you're able to see in three dimensions; however, when you take a picture of a three-dimensional view, it is displayed in only two dimensions. The interesting scene you see with three dimensions may lose all its interest in two. During your walks, find a scene that you would want to photograph. Close one of your eyes and look at the scene with just one eye, much the same as your camera does. If what you thought was an interesting picture now looks dull, then it's not worth recording. If the scene still captures your attention with your one-eyed view, then it's likely to be just as interesting in two dimensions on your computer screen, or printed on paper.

Contrast

Take the dimensional exercise above one step further to help you identify contrast in a scene. With one eye still closed, squint with the open eye. As you practice this again and again, the contrast between light and dark areas of the scene should become more obvious and the details should become prominent. Those are marks of a photo to capture.

Light

Digital photography is amazing technology, but it's not advanced enough to recognize the differences between highlights and shadows. This exercise will train your eyes to see the direction of light sources and how the light falls on objects in a scene. This time, take your walk during the early morning and late afternoon periods. The direction of sunlight will be low and the light will be more diffused. There may also be other light sources, such as streetlights or signs. Look for the subtle shifts in light, how it filters through various levels of objects in the scene. Sunrise and sunset can create reflections off various surfaces that wouldn't be there at high noon. Crouch low to see the light's effect from a low angle and stand on an object or move to higher ground to see the light on the top of objects and surfaces.

Color

During your walks, be more conscious of color. Select a single color in a scene that interests you and concentrate just on the color. Now, move to different angles to view the color, noticing how light and contrast change. Eventually, the colored area will appear to dominate the scene. Make this color exercise part of your eye-training regimen and you'll be shooting much

improved digital photography soon.

Framing

By design, cameras frame an image with boundaries, or limits. Your eyes see a much larger view, with virtually no limits. Your next exercise is to learn how to see the photograph as your camera does, and not as you do. First, create a training frame. Cut an 8" x 10" piece of cardboard. Then make a 4" x 6" opening in the center of the board. Then, during your walks, use this frame to compose what could be an interesting photo. The border of the board blocks the other elements you would see with your eye just as your camera does. As you practice with the board, eventually you'll train your eye to impose a frame on a scene, blocking what you wouldn't want in your picture.

Training your photographer's eye and mind takes some conscious effort and diligence, but it's the one skill that could have the most positive effect on your photography.

Chapter 8: Avoid Stereotypical Photos

Filling your camera's memory card with stereotypical photos is a major obstacle to success for many photographers, especially beginners and hobbyists. Too many of them mistakenly think that the bad choices below make them more creative when, in fact, they identify you as a photographer who shoots with no thought or plan for capturing specific and unique visions. Avoiding stereotypical photos also relates to developing a style, which is an important quality of the successful professional. Once you've developed a conscious photography style, more people will want to view your images, you'll be more confident and you'll experience one of the highest levels of success a non-professional can ever obtain.



Unimaginative subject matter

Too many digital photographers haven't developed the creative mindset to think beyond the typical subject matter seen in many images, such as sunsets, flowers in the garden or a pet playing on the lawn or in the park. You'll know you are advancing as a photographer when you can shoot these subjects with a creative twist, making the mundane or every-day world dynamic and appealing to viewers.

Lens flare faux pas

Lens flare is an acceptable technique to enhance appropriate scenes and subjects, but you want to be sure you understand how to use it, before you try it. The stereotypical lens-flare gives photos an unnatural look, and will often dominate the scene or subject. The amateur photographer's mistake is to create lens flare with the bright, midday sun. The softer light of dusk is a much better source of lens flare.

Forget about black and white

Another method that distinguishes amateur from professional photography is shooting in black and white because the amateur thinks it is creative. It could be creative, but only in the hands of a photographer who understands why and how to use black and white. Although it may seem counter-intuitive, it's better for the amateur to learn color photography concepts and techniques before trying to be artistic with black and white.

Combining color and black and white

Another stereotypical method that amateurs think is creative is a black and white image with a portion of it rendered in full color: a black and white photo of a small child holding a red ball, a full-color flower against a black-and-white background or a black-and-white portrait with the person's eye color revealed. These actually become distractions to what you are trying to show and the message you are trying to send.

Inappropriate watermarks or other photo-protection devices

Amateurs should learn this lesson from the pros early in their photography experience. Nothing says "amateur" more than a gaudy watermark slapped across a photo. You can identify and protect your images with an appropriate border and a small watermark in a lower corner of each image.

Don't be fooled by HDR

HDR is High Dynamic Range and it has legitimate uses when manipulating images in post processing; however, don't allow it to become a standard technique. Typically, when amateurs apply HDR, colors appear over-saturated or look unnatural in relation to the lighting conditions. Learn how to create excellent photos in the camera instead of relying on various editing tricks, such as HDR.

Shoot in horizontal or vertical format, not between

There are few instances when angling your camera somewhere between landscape (horizontal) and portrait (vertical) formats results in an interesting or compelling photo. Many amateurs rely on this technique to include details in the picture that wouldn't be there in a landscape or portrait view. They haven't yet learned to move themselves to a wider view or to switch to a lens with a wider angle. Holding your camera at a tilted angle can prove useful for street photography, representing the dynamics and vibe of the street in a random or radical manner. Otherwise, the "camera tilt" is of no value for the great majority of photographers.

Photo titles, sayings and messages

Even amateur photos share an artistic goal with most creative, professional images, and other works of fine art. This is allowing viewers to interpret and appreciate your photos from their point of view without you trying to influence them with silly titling, cute sayings or unnecessary messages imprinted on the image. You want viewers to see and enjoy your photos in their entirety.

Chapter 9: The History of Photography

Read, and know, the history of photography, at least in broad, general terms. This may never help you compose a better photo, but having this knowledge is some portion of what it takes to be a successful photographer.

Photography is almost as old as modern science. Although the ancient Greeks and other early cultures did not have cameras, as we would define them today, they did understand the concept of "camera obscura." It combines two Latin words, "camera," which means "room," and "obscura," which means "dark," therefore, "dark room." Leonardo da Vinci is credited with the first known written explanation of camera obscura, which appeared in his notebooks of 1490. Less than 100 years later, 1544 to be exact, a convex lens was placed in the opening of a camera obscura to observe a solar eclipse. A mirror was then positioned to reflect the image onto a surface that was 180 degrees opposite the hole and subject matter. By the early 19th century, the camera obscura was further modified to allow scientists to introduce the second historical advancement of photography: light-sensitive materials.

It was accepted knowledge among many scientists before the 19th century that specific silver compounds, now known as

silver halides, would become black when exposed to light. It was during the early 19th century in England that Thomas Wedgwood first experimented with silver nitrate to cause this effect. He was able to “photograph” silhouettes of subjects, but unless they were kept in a dark place, the images were true to the principle and turned black.



As the early pioneers of photography continued to search for the answer to what is photography, it wasn't until 1827 that the Frenchman, Joseph-Nicéphore Niépce, captured the first permanent photograph that could be viewed in the light of day. At the time, lithography, a graphic arts printing method, was a new idea. Niépce proceeded from his interest in lithography to create a process, with the use of bitumen, a resinous substance, and oil of lavender, to record an image from a “camera obscura.”

The next step in the search for what is photography occurred when Niépce entered into a partnership with Louis-Jacques-Mandé Daguerre, another Frenchman, who had been experimenting with silver iodide. Their work led to what would become the first, true photographic process known as daguerreotypy. A silver-coated sheet of copper was treated with various chemicals before being exposed to light in a camera. It was then developed in much the same manner, as film would be during the 20th century. Although the process was complicated and required exposures of several minutes in bright sunlight, it became very popular in England and the United States, as a technique to create portraits. The French used daguerreotypy to photograph landscapes and cityscapes.

William Henry Fox Talbot was also conducting simultaneous experiments in England looking for the elusive secret to what is photography. Instead of a sheet of copper, he used a piece of paper impregnated with silver nitrate. This process resulted in a negative image of the scene or subject, which could then be transformed into a positive image by placing the negative on another piece of impregnated paper and exposing them to light. Talbot's images were not as sharp as Daguerre's, but Talbot could make a number of prints from a single negative, which Daguerre was unable to do from his copper plate.

F. Scott Archer, another Englishman, was responsible for the next major advancement in photography when he developed his wet-collodion process. Instead of Daguerre's copper plate or Talbot's paper, Archer used a glass plate also coated with silver halides. Although Archer's process was almost as complicated as daguerreotypy, it was much less expensive, and created a sharper image than Talbot's method. Archer's glass plate had to remain wet to be light sensitive, but this resulted in the development of the first mobile darkroom, so photographers could prepare the plates just before exposing them.

George Eastman may be the single most important person in the history of photography, as he was able to transform photography from an art form for the few to a hobby for the masses. During the 1880s, he developed roll film and a roll holder that replaced the glass plate holders in large view cameras. Eastern American Film became the first transparent photographic "film." This, in turn, led to the first commercial transparent roll film during 1889, which was critical to the development of Edison's motion picture camera during 1891. By 1888, Eastman had created the first Kodak camera, which was pre-loaded with 100 exposures of roll film.

By inventing a camera that was a consumer product, Eastman paved the way for Leica, Nikon and Canon to develop the single-lens reflex camera. Then, Kodak created the world's first digital camera during 1975; a technology that has transformed the history of photography again, resulting in today's digital cameras and being able to take pictures with your smartphone.

Chapter 10: The Great Photographers



Although photography, as an art form, is not 200 years old, it has produced some great artists. They are more than photographers; they are visionaries who see the world with the most unique eyes and minds of artists of any genre. You should know the people that made the history, and how and why. This portion of photographic knowledge is often where a budding amateur finds his or her passion, in the example of a photographic pioneer, for a particular kind of photography and/or style.

During 2010, *Professional Photography* magazine published an issue entitled, 100 Most Influential Photographers of All Time. You can access the list at:

<http://www.professionalphotographer.co.uk/Magazine/Photographic-Inspiration/100-most-influential-photographers-of-all-time>

The Web page provides a brief biographical paragraph and a link to many of the photographer's Websites. Typing the names without a link into a search engine will reveal many sources of detail information.

The great 19th century photographers were taking pictures as the basic science and concepts of photography were still being developed. Maybe, Mathew Brady is the most well known, as The Civil War provided him with the opportunity to turn from portrait work to creating one of the greatest American photography collections.

Other 19th century photographers who deserve your attention.

- Julie Margaret Cameron – Undoubtedly, the first great female photographer whose portraits are eagerly sought by today's collectors.
- Roger Fenton – He is best known for early landscapes of England and his photos of the Crimean War.
- Paul Martin – He is credited with developing the candid photography style, hiding his camera in a suitcase, and taking un-posed images of the London working class.
- Eadweard Muybridge – He is considered the inventor of instant photography, but is most famous for proving, with a series of photographs, that all four hooves of a horse were off the ground simultaneously.
- Alfred Stieglitz – He was famous throughout the late 19th century and the first half of the 20th century, and is known as the “father” of American art photography.
- Edward Curtis – He is particularly noteworthy for preserving Native American cultures before the old ways were lost completely. Curtis' 30-year project and more than 40,000 photographs became one of the most ambitious publishing projects ever, the 20-volume series, *The North American Indian*.

Photo District News published its 20th anniversary issue during May 2000, and included a list of the 20 Most Influential Photographers from 1980–2000. With such names as Richard Avedon, Henri-Cartier Bresson, Nan Goldin, Gordon Parks, Sebastião Salgado and Herb Ritts, you'll find many styles and photography genres to study.

Although not included in the *Photo District News* list, additional 20th century photographers whose styles and images are interesting to study are Diane Arbus, Man Ray, Mick Rock, Araki, Leni Riefenstahl and Robert Capa.

Ansel Adams is the one photographer whose name and work are probably the most well known among non-photographers and the world in general. Adams' landscapes of Yosemite, other national parks and the American Southwest have been reproduced in millions of posters, calendars and cards and numerous books. Posters of his images have probably decorated the walls of college dorms and apartments as much as the latest rock god or sports hero.

Adams was able to direct and focus his energy on learning the theory and practice of photography, to date, and then developing new ideas and techniques. Not only were these evident in his images, but also the photos of innumerable enthusiasts and professionals, including those of today. His 10-volume technical “encyclopedia” remains unmatched.

Three of the 10 still contain information and insights that will teach today's photographers much more of what they need to know about photography.

The Camera is undoubtedly the most important of these, as the first volume in the set. It doesn't matter if the camera in use is a Kodak No. 1 Box Brownie, which was Adams first as a child, or the latest digital model, the power of Adams' technical explanations are just as meaningful and applicable.

Ansel Adams at 100 is the commemorative book that was published during November 2003, and is one of the best collections of his works in book form. It showcases 114 of both his well-known photos and images of himself at work and reveling in the amazing life he lived.

AnselAdams.com is the photographer's official Website, where the exhibits at his Yosemite Gallery and the exhibitions of his work throughout the world are listed.

Image credit: <http://www.nps.gov/resources/person.htm?id=48>

Chapter 11: Study Today's Leading Photographers

Don't stop with the great photographers of the past. It's equally important to know who are today's best photographers, and in various categories: sports, landscapes, portraits, etc. These people are your contemporaries; they are occupying and experiencing the same world as you, so they have much to teach you about how to photograph this time and place.

PhotographyTalk has interviewed many of today's leading photographers who are eager to share their success secrets with you.

Adrian Klein: Sharing his Joy of Being in Wild Places

Seeking adventures in wild places most of his life has been Adrian Klein's most important photography learning experience. He knew the natural world of Northwest America long before it became the palette for his success as a landscape photographer. He had often seen the lines and shapes that create these spectacular and subtle scenes, which has drive his passion to capture and share these images with the world. Now, as a professional photographer, he has translated his visions into digital compositions, resulting in publication, awards and the opportunity to help other photographers through his workshops. His Website is adrianklein.com.

"Success does not normally happen overnight. Don't feel the need to rush constantly to the same scenes and comps as everyone else. Take your time to learn, explore and create what you feel and see. This will only help you in the long run. Best of luck in your business!"

Andy Marcus: Creating Family Memories for Three Generations

Andy Marcus is a highly acclaimed social events photographer who operates Fred Marcus Photography in New York, a studio his father and mother founded during 1941. Today, Andy's son, Brian, is the third generation of Marcuses in the business. Andy is proud to follow in the footsteps of his father, photographing weddings and other family and social events with stunning portrait techniques and memorable candid effects.

"Work with a photographer you respect and absorb everything: the good, the bad, everything. Being a great photographer does not happen overnight."

Erik Almas: Evoking a Quiet Sense of Beauty

It's clear when you view Erik Almas' photography that he is totally immersed in the process of image making. His visions are simultaneously subtle and powerful, giving places and people great depth and definition that welcome easily, but asks for thorough contemplation of the elements and emotions being evoked.

“Define for yourself what you are drawn to visually. Become aware of your identity and photographic DNA. See and understand light. Understand your photographer tools: technical, visual and emotional. Seek a mentor. Study the photographers before you and learn from the old masters. Make rather than take. CREATE imagery. Connect with the place or person you are photographing. Find an emotional as well as a visual perspective.”

Justin Black: Connecting Photos of the Natural World with the Human Spirit

Justin Black has been a professional photographer since 1995. He served as Executive Director of the International League of Conservation Photographers (ILCP), and was General Manager and Curator of Galen Rowell's Mountain Light Photography for 7 years.

Since 1999, Justin has created inspiring educational photographic experiences for more than a thousand passionate photographers, most recently as the co-founder of Visionary Wild during early 2011. It offers serious amateurs and professionals world-class workshops in photographically challenging and exotic locations around the globe. The current workshop schedule is available at visionarywild.com.

“Know yourself, become educated and empower yourself with knowledge. One has to be clever, creative, talented, insightful, hardworking and more to make a decent living as a photographer these days. I’m always inclined to tell someone who is considering a career as a photographer to run to another field as fast as possible. It has always seemed to me that the most successful photographers are those who feel like it isn’t a matter of weighing pros and cons and career options; it’s simply who they are and they ‘just do it’.”

Roger Hill: Daring to Face Danger with Only a Digital Camera

Images credits: Roger Hill



It’s not a charging grizzly bear or rhino that Roger Hill faces whenever he is on the hunt. No, his quarry is the most powerful force of weather on earth, a tornado. For approximately 25 years, he has spent his time chasing and capturing still images and video of more than 600 tornados and other severe weather events across the U.S. He found his niche; and today all the major TV networks buy his work. Learn how one photographer succeeded by turning his camera on a subject “in own backyard.”

“Find something different and unique and capitalize on it. It can be a challenge, but that’s what makes us unusual and unique.”



Chapter 12: Join a Local Photography Club

Being a member of a group of like-minded photographers is one of your best success steps. You’ll have the opportunity to explore challenging techniques with other photographers similarly challenged and be guided by advanced photographers who know how to overcome those challenges. The club experience can be an excellent source of inspiration as well as stimulating competition.

If you’ve never been a member of a photography club, then you might be surprised to learn that there are clubs in small towns and individual communities in large cities. Some clubs are for professionals, other for amateurs; many are based on

specific photography genres, such as landscapes, portraits, macro, etc. You're also apt to find a club that is solely focused on the use and creativity of Photoshop or Lightroom.

What may be the greatest benefit of being a member is that you won't have to "reinvent the wheel." Whether you're passionate about photography as a hobby or your ultimate goal is to become a professional, many, if not most, club members have already followed one of more of the paths to successful photography that you also want to travel. By "going it alone," you'll spend an excessive amount of time, money and effort making mistakes during your journey to photographic success and/or becoming unnecessarily frustrated or bored, all of which could be avoided with the help of club members who "have been there and done that."

Many photography clubs have monthly or bi-monthly meetings, each with a specific theme, such as the camera phone, water and light, urban decay, working with a model, textures, depth-of-field, flowers, birds, etc. Often, a themed meeting includes a presentation or workshop from an experienced member or a guest professional who has made a living in a particularly genre. Members will share and discuss their images that match with the meeting theme and/or use what they learn to improve their skills and understanding of the theme.

As a photography club member, you'll also have access to seminars and workshops that professionals in the area conduct, and are often exclusively for club members. Clubs also plan and host regular exhibits of members' work at local art centers, community centers, libraries, etc. It's another opportunity to share club members' images and learn what techniques were used as well as having your photos exposed to the cold reality of public viewing and criticism. Most clubs' award prizes to participating members.

Many clubs not only have Websites, but also invite members to link their sites to the club site, providing additional exposure of your images and interaction with other club members and interested non-photographers. Some clubs host photography days, inviting club members and all photographers to shoot during one specific day the same or similar subject. The best of these images become the contents of commemorative photo books.

As a member of a photography club, you'll find it easier to accomplish many of the other success steps in this e-book, from specific camera and editing techniques to finding one or more shooting buddies to learning how to create a Website to connecting with a mentor. Another advantage of club membership is discovering new and excellent locations for outdoor portraits, wildlife or landscapes subject you didn't know existed in your area. Members are much more likely to share their secret spots than with non-member photographers.

Being a member of a photography club could be an enormous asset when it comes to selecting and buying equipment. You could save hundreds of dollars by learning from members what particular brand of gear to buy or avoid, based on their previous experience. More experienced members can show you the best equipment for the kind of photography you like to shoot and the special gizmos and accessories that will enhance your results. Some will also have experience with local brick-and-mortar retail camera stores and/or online stores, and can steer you to the best bargains and those retailers with the best warranties and customer service.

Photography clubs are informal, but serious about advancing every member to more success. Memberships are typically very affordable, less than \$50 a year. It is one of the best investments you can make in becoming a more successful photographer.



Chapter 13: Find a Photo Buddy

Digital photography is an art form that allows individuals to express themselves. That doesn't mean it must be or should be done alone. Photography as a "team sport" may not be the first thought that crosses your mind. Many photographers, however, especially beginners and amateurs, have discovered that sharing an occasional assignment or picture-taking adventure with a "photo pal" is very beneficial and enjoyable.

Here are some reasons to start a photo-pal relationship with another photographer.

A preliminary tip is to look for someone with relatively the same experience, skills and equipment as you. A beginner wouldn't have enough pre-knowledge to understand many of the advanced techniques of a professional, especially if the amateur was using a compact digital camera and the professional a DSLR. A professional wouldn't learn much from a beginner and might become frustrated that he spent the entire shoot trying to teach the amateur those advanced techniques (which he or she never seemed to grasp) instead of taking his or her own pictures.

Interchangeable equipment

When you do choose a photo pal with identical or interchangeable equipment, both of you have immediately doubled the size of your camera bags. You'll have a greater array of lens, filters, artificial lights and other accessories to expand the type of photos you can take. Plus, it's wonderful to have buddy with you that has an extra memory card or set of batteries that he or she is eager to lend you.

Human interaction

It's probably safe to say that two humans interact best when they share an interest, hobby or passion. Their visions and goals are nearly identical, which creates one of those synergistic moments when the two of you are able to create greater photos together than you ever could alone. There's probably some truth to the idea that the interaction with another photographer of similar skills opens your mind to see your subject matter in new ways, allowing you to produce some of your best work.

Separate perspectives

Although you may share a passion for digital photography with your photo pal, and even have the same equipment, you each bring a different point of view and shooting style to your shared assignment. In fact, it's important to choose a photo pal that does have a very different perspective than you. That contrast will help both of you continue to develop your photographer's eye.

Learning lab

Discussing and understanding why your photo pal shot a particular picture a particular way is an excellent learning method. You'll be surprised how digital photo techniques that have given you trouble are suddenly clear when you learn them from a friend during your photo field trip.

Collaborative support

Another reason to work with a photo pal is the value of an extra pair of hands and eyes (and even additional muscle if needed). You'll have the opportunity to take some photos as a true team, each contributing to the composition and techniques used. Either of you also make an excellent light or reflector stand for the other. Having someone available to hold a flash unit some distance from the camera could make all the difference in taking the best picture possible of a subject.

Twice the results

Whether you and your photo pal are shooting an event or a morning of nature photography, do a bit of planning, so each of you separate and take pictures of different parts of the event or the woodland. You'll happily discover when you return home that not only will you have twice as many photos, but also they complement each other as well as present exciting contrasts.

Improve your photography skills quicker and make your hobby, your passion, more enjoyable with a photo pal.

Chapter 14: Find a Mentor

Photography has had the time (although its history is short) to develop into a fully realized art form, considered the equal of the classical fine arts, such as painting and sculpture. Photography has also developed into a commercial product that is a critical component of many industries: fashion, retailing, advertising, etc. Because of its "maturity," photography is similar to the fine arts, in that it is also a craft that consists of technical, hands-on knowledge and enough compositional nuances and "secrets" to be passed from master to apprentice or mentor to beginner.

Finding and working with a photography "master" today would be very similar to what a young, aspiring painter would have learned and experienced spending years with Michelangelo, Rembrandt or Picasso. Any type of formal education in photography is an important component, too, but the guidance and individual attention of a mentor is priceless. Not only are you more likely to become the successful photographer you want to be, but also you'll acquire techniques and insider secrets that aren't taught in school.

Finding a mentor may be easier than you think. If you've taken step #12 to success, Join a Local Photography Club, then you're likely to find one or more among the other members. They may know of professionals or members of other local clubs that have mentored other beginners or amateurs with a desire to go professional. When you attend a seminar or workshop of a recognized professional, don't hesitate to approach him or her and ask about being your mentor. You might be surprised to learn that many professionals and veteran photographers are eager to guide a newcomer. They also understand the master/apprentice tradition of the arts and know how important that whatever they've learned is passed to a younger generation, so those techniques and methods are preserved.

If you're relatively new to photography, or maybe just acquired your first DSLR, then any photographer, regardless of his or her specialty, that is willing to mentor you, is an excellent source of the basics. If you have more experience as a photographer and have developed an interest in a particular genre, such as landscapes or portraits, then it's probably better to ask professionals that are proficient in those genres to serve as a mentor.



Before approaching any photographer to be a mentor, develop a loose outline, even if only in your head, of what specifically you want to learn and the kind of results you'd like to see in your photography. Not only will the potential mentor be

impressed with your preparation, but also he or she will see that you are serious about becoming a more successful photographer. Often, it's your drive, your passion, your confidence that you can succeed that will convince a photographer to be your mentor, not spouting various theories and concepts you may have already learned, or talking about the inner workings of a piece of gear. "Masters" want "apprentices" with a clear goal and the self-motivation to work hard to achieve it.

Just because you're the student doesn't mean you don't have an obligation to yourself to check the credentials, qualities and accomplishments of a photographer who could become your mentor. You want to know he or she is clearly recognized by their peers and the customers/clients they serve as a true professional, both as a technical proficient photographer, a successful business owner and a responsible member of his or her community. The network of contacts you've developed as a member of a photography club are certainly good sources of information about any potential mentor. It's also appropriate to suggest to a photographer you've approached to be your mentor that you would like to spend a few hours or a day with him or her during a typical day to determine if both of you are a good match, before anyone makes a commitment. Since you'll be working closely with this person, it's a good idea to understand how he or she works, his or her temperament during a shooting assignment and how he or she interacts with clients, models and assistants.

A good mentor will challenge you and may even be highly critical at times of your work. It's, therefore, a great opportunity to learn how to accept criticism, develop a bit of a thick skin; because as both an art form and a product in the marketplace, your photography, all photography, attracts much criticism.

If you want to succeed as a photographer, then there are few if any better ways than following in the footsteps and receiving the guidance of a professional who has made the mistakes, experienced the pitfalls and received the criticism...and still has been able to succeed.

Chapter 15: Attend Photography Conferences

If you truly want to succeed as a photographer, then you must understand it as an "industry" as well as an art form. By



attending local, regional or national industry events, you're able to see all the latest equipment as well as listen to the professionals speak about what it takes to succeed.

Of the hundreds, maybe thousands, of photography conferences and trade shows across the globe, these are a few that you should seriously consider attending. Don't think the big ones are just for professionals; they have exhibits, seminars and other events for beginners, experienced amateurs and students. You may not be able to travel half around the world to a major event; however, it could also be one of the great travel/vacation photography opportunities: Spend time at the show and photograph the city and even some of the country that is hosting the conference. You're virtually guaranteed that it will be a learning experience like no other; plus, it's the

perfect place to expand your network; and if you're an aspiring professional or soon-to-graduate photography student, you might just find your first or next professional job there.

You'll maximize your investment in traveling to and attending a photography conference with some homework and preparation. Spend some quality time on the conference/trade show's Website to discover exactly what is being offered during the next event. Make sure there will be exhibits and presentations that will help you succeed as a photographer, at your current level and to where you want your skills to advance. Don't hesitate to ask the conference host/sponsor for

contact information of others who have attended previous conferences to help determine the true value of the show for you.

Many conferences/trade shows preview the latest photography products. If you're in the market for a new camera or other pieces of equipment, then check that a particular show will feature the manufacturer(s) of what you want to buy. If you are planning to drop some major coin on new gear soon, then don't hesitate to spend plenty of time at the manufacturer(s)' booth, asking all the questions you want. After all, you may be spending money with that company, so make sure they treat you like a valued customer. Some manufacturers exhibiting at a trade show may allow attendees to use new equipment or conduct seminars teaching you how to use it. Check on these details and make sure to take advantage of all these opportunities. You can't know enough about new photography equipment before you spend your hard-earned money to buy it.

The following are just a few of the many photography conferences that occur annually or bi-annually. Read more about them on their Websites and try to schedule at least one major and one regional or local conference every year. It's also a good idea to check these and other conferences' Websites regularly because if the sponsor has scheduled a future trade show near your home, then you definitely want to attend...you'll be saving considerable money on travel, lodging, meals, etc.

- The PDN (Photo District News) PhotoPlus Expo is the largest photography show in North America, with more than 20,000 photographers in attendance and hundreds of exhibitors, thousands of new products are a long list of seminars, hands-on labs and special events. (The 30th anniversary Expo is October 23–26, 2013, in New York City.)
- The WPPI, or Wedding & Portrait Photography Conference & Expo, was, of course, specifically developed for wedding and portrait photographers; and if these subjects interest you, or your goal is to become a wedding or portrait professional, then WPPI is virtually a requirement. The conference is weeklong and attracts more than 10,000 photographers every year. (WPPI 2014 is February 27–March 6, 2014, in Las Vegas at the MGM Grand Las Vegas.)
- Photokina is the world's leading imaging fair, and is held every two years. More than 180,000 digital photographers and other imaging enthusiasts and professionals from 165 countries gather for a full week of amazing events and the opportunity to interact with approximately 1,250 exhibitors who'll be showing their latest products and services. (Photokina 2014 is September 16–21, 2014, in Cologne-Duetz, Germany.)
- CP⁺ is another major international photography and imaging show, which is held in Japan every year. Its primary purpose is to highlight the Japanese photography equipment industry, which just so happens to make most of the cameras and lenses in the world. (CP⁺ 2014 is scheduled for September 13–16, 2014, in Yokohama, Japan.)



- The Photo Marketing Association is the host of PMA@CES. This international convention and trade show competes with both Photokina and CP⁺. PMA@CES occurs at the same time as the International CES (Consumer Electronics Show) and just down the street in Las Vegas. (PMA@CES 2014 is January 7–14, 2014, in Las Vegas at the LVH (formerly the Las Vegas Hilton.)

- PhotoPro Expo is the largest photography trade show in the Midwest US, with more than 100 exhibitors and an expert panel of photographers speaking on a broad range of topics. Like these other conferences, PhotoPro Expo offers clinics and workshops as well as photography and print

competitions. (PhotoPro Expo 2014 is scheduled for February 6–10, 2014, in Covington, Kentucky.)

- The Nature Photography Summit and Trade Show is the primary event of The North American Nature Photography Association (NANPA). It serves as an educational conference for NANPA members. One day of the event was opened to the public for the first time during the 2013 show in Jacksonville, Florida. (Check the NANPA Website for the next conference dates and location.)

Chapter 16: Visit Art Galleries and Museums

Most of the compositional rules, guidelines and methods of photography are derived from the fine arts, including perspective, placement of elements, point of view (POV), rule of thirds, contrast, color balance, etc. Spending regular time at art galleries and museums will provide you with the best examples of how the old (and new) masters used these concepts and many others to create visually, in both two and three dimensions.

Viewing and studying paintings, drawings and illustrations will help you develop that part of your photographer's eye and mind that must be able to transfer the three dimensions of life/reality onto a flat, two-dimensional surface. The better photographers have this insight and it is one of the most critical creative elements that allow them to succeed photographically.

There are a number of basic elements of composition that you should observe in paintings, which will enhance your understanding of how to use them with your camera instead of a brush.

Lines

Every photo (or painting) begins with establishing the primary horizontal line, be it the actual visible horizon in a landscape picture or the implied horizontal anchoring line of a portrait photo. Look for paintings that have placed the horizon or primary horizontal line along either of the two horizontal lines that divide the canvas in thirds, thus the rule-of-thirds. A good technique is to avoid long, uninterrupted horizons or primary horizontal line. Your photos will have more energy and interest if you cover part of the horizontal line with objects.

Next, turn your attention to portrait or vertically oriented paintings and look for the use of vertical lines, which create a different kind of energy: growth, reaching for the sky and an uplifting feeling. The strongest vertical line(s) should appear on or near the lines that divide the canvas into vertical thirds.

Diagonal lines can be strong compositional elements, too, and often serve to simulate perspective on a two-dimensional surface. Look for a diagonal line from the lower left to upper right, but not one that intersects with the border of the painting. This type of diagonal line has proven to be pleasing to the mind and guides it to any subject or object on that diagonal line.

Shapes

Another critical element of any artistic composition is recognizing objects and subjects, as basic shapes and their relationship to each other. A common mistake of art and photography students is to identify the objects, subjects and scenes, according to their details. When studying paintings at a gallery, disregard the details of the objects and subjects and instead look for the basic geometric shapes that define the primary subject matter, peripheral or distant objects and the "open" space between them.

For example, the better landscape compositions often include a smaller object in the foreground to create a balance with the grand sweep of landscape across the background. This object may suggest a circle that leads the eye to the landscape scene. Similarly, it may be an arch of a wind-blown sapling or a curved arm of driftwood on the beach. Often, the strongest element is not the object itself, but how its form reveals the geometry of the open space to its right or left.

Squares of different sizes, in the foreground and background, can become repetitive shapes within a composition. Look how one square may dominant, while smaller squares accent or support it. Your challenge is to transfer this effect to your photography and position your camera such that you can create a balance with a series of squares.

Textures

As you view paintings in a gallery, stand closer and look for how an artist may have used paint to create various textures that add interest to a composition. Paint may be thin or thick, in multiple layers to suggest three-dimensionality. Multimedia artwork may include pieces of various fabrics, wood, metal, plastic and other substances that help to define the artist's



vision. Many types of sculptures are also created with the use of textures. Clay or other medium may have smooth or rough surfaces.

Contrasts and Shadows

One of the strongest compositional elements in many artists' toolbox is contrast and shadowing. These are particularly important to recognize and study in paintings, as they add emotion, dimension and drama to an image. A close examination of sculptures will also reveal how the positions of arms, legs and torso cast shadows on the whole work. Even the shadows that a human form sculpture casts on a wall or the floor of a gallery can also teach you much about contrast and shadowing.

An interesting exercise that many photographers have tried is to "reproduce" the composition (arrangement of objects/subjects, perspective, contrast, etc.) of a famous work of art. This is a challenge that will definitely help you become a more successful photographer.

Chapter 17: Learn Appreciation of Your Art Form

As the use and importance of social media increases, "like" has become the operative word for expressing one's acceptance of or agreement with an idea, an image, a product or whatever someone has shared digitally. "Like," as far as it goes (and it doesn't go very far), is just fine as a response in the real-world pace of social media. It's totally unresponsive and inappropriate, however, when it comes to viewing, analyzing and gaining a deep understanding of an artist's expression on canvas or the sensor in a digital camera. Works of art deserve more than simply being liked; they must be appreciated; and this requires substantially more effort on the part of the viewer than a quick look and a quick click on the Like icon.

If, as a photographer, your goal is to create art, then you must also know how to view it, and learn to appreciate what an artist is trying to achieve. You would certainly expect the same respect and attention for your creative efforts from those who view them.

"Like" is a superficial expression of being attracted to a work of art, in this case. It's also the reason that the word "love" describes a much stronger and deeper emotion in personal relationships than telling someone you "like" him or her. Like lacks commitment. "It (or he or she) looks good, but I'm not sure yet." Moving from like to love in a personal relationship should take some time and careful consideration before making such an important commitment. In the world of photography and other art forms, however, it's essentially impossible to connect with a work of art, to understand it and the artist's mission without a total commitment.

Those that rely on "like" as a standard measure of art usually find it difficult to explain why they "like" a photograph, painting, sculpture, etc. The reason again is because their interaction with the work is so minimal. Often, they are only reacting to the obvious features: the colors, the scene or the expression on a subject's face. These are definitely important elements to connect one with the work, but they are only surface observations. Where one actually connects with art is below the surface.

Artists want their work to be more than liked. They are seeking understanding from viewers of the deep emotion or outside effect that inspired them to create a painting, photograph, etc. To feel completed, artists need a strong bond to be forged between themselves and viewers. They want the viewer to "experience" (and then appreciate) the pain, the joy and/or the

introspection that led to their expression of it in an art form.

To share the mindset of the artist, to understand his or her creation at that deeper level requires viewers, and even other artists (including photographers), to learn how to “appreciate” a work of art. Appreciation is non-judgmental, whereas “like” is most of the time. A “like” viewer likes this set of colors, but not that set. This is a perfect example of missing the point. The colors were the exclusive choice of the artist; the viewer was not consulted. Instead of dismissing the artist’s color palette because you don’t “like” it, you try to understand why the artist chose the colors he or she did. As your understanding increases, you begin to accept that the artist picked the right colors for the photo/painting he or she had in mind.

A viewer can’t experience or express any appreciation for a photograph until he or she has spent time observing the work from various angles, distances and under different light sources, and learning about its background or source of inspiration. When you look at your photos or those of other photographers, and even other works of art, try to observe and learn as much as possible about the following components.

- Look at the composition of the photo’s most obvious elements. What is their relationship to each other? An asymmetrical arrangement may be more compelling than a symmetrical one. Are the shapes of the elements variations on a single shape or is each element a unique shape?
- Analyze the color palette in relation to the composition and the story being told or the message being sent. Do the colors add power to the arrangement of the elements and/or emphasize objects, subjects or areas of the composition? Do the colors help you understand the character/personality of subjects or the atmosphere of the place?
- Appreciation of a work of art also occurs when you’re able to “read” the primary subject’s story within the composition. Was the artist able to explain why and how the subject is the subject of the work? Do his or her facial expression and/or body language reveal what he or she was thinking at the moment of artistic capture?
- Allow your eyes to wander through the space of a photo or painting. Does it tell a story about the location and/or why the artist chose it? What is the balance of space between primary and secondary elements? How has the artist used negative space to express his or her thoughts and feelings, and enhance the story being told?
- Look for a message or moral in the photograph. In a sense, this is the conclusion of the story. Is the artist issuing a warning? Is he or she trying to lift your spirits? Is there a social/political agenda evident in the art?
- It’s nearly impossible to appreciate works of art without taking the time to learn about the artist: his or her background, sources of inspiration, etc. Is this photo part of a series? How was the photograph shot technically, with what equipment?

“Like” is easy and quick and an adequate response to all the content that pops onto your Facebook page, Twitter, Google+, whatever. “Appreciation,” however, requires much more time and effort than the fast-paced social media world allows; but it’s the only mindset for those who aspire to be artists and those who want a deeper understanding of their work.

Chapter 18: Attend Art Classes

Traditional photography, and then digital photography, didn’t magically appear as an art form. It is just one of a long series of human expressions, each of which also required the introduction of specific technologies to make it possible to draw, paint, sculpt and photograph our world. For thousands of years, an untold number of artists had to develop compositional, perspective, spatial and many other techniques, and to study light, so these techniques could be applied to the art of photography once the appropriate technologies had been invented.

Because digital photography is such an obvious extension of the classic art forms, one of the best ways to improve your photography skills is to attend drawing, painting, sculpting, ceramics and the many other classes that are offered in most communities. Many of these programs are developed for children (which you should consider adding to your children’s summer schedules), but there are also many adult arts classes. Some programs even include photography courses. You’ll find many of these programs at art schools, museums, art leagues and other arts-related organizations in your community. Be prepared to pay a fee, but some may also be free, so check the details carefully.



Attending one or more arts classes could help you become a better photographer in many ways. Quite likely, the most important is developing your photographer's, or artist's eye. In a number of PhotographyTalk interviews with highly regarded professional photographers, they comment that beginners or amateurs' biggest mistake is including too many elements within the frame. The pros advise that the key to great photography is simplicity of composition. To apply this technique requires that you are able to see, truly see, what you are viewing through the lens.

Arts classes in drawing and painting will help you develop the skill of "seeing," and contemplating what you are seeing before taking quick, thoughtless snapshots of whatever scene or subject matter

happens to be in view. You'll also be "forced" to draw an object or subject in its simplest form and still be recognizable. You'll develop the ability to see objects and subjects as forms or shapes and understand how to position them, or you and your camera, to create a balanced and attractive image.

Classes in drawing human anatomy are particularly useful for any photographer. You'll find full-body courses and others that concentrate on hands, head and faces. Not only will you learn about the shape of the human body, but also recognizing and controlling the elements of space and value to create better compositions. Many drawing and painting courses will provide you with the opportunity to study the works of old masters as well as contemporary artists, and receive the guidance of instructors about how you can gain inspiration from the great works of art for your photography.

Some of the concepts you'll learn during a painting class apply specifically to photography. Painting adds the elements of color and texture that are not necessarily a part of a drawing class. Understanding color is critical to the success of any photographer. Again, the key is to see it as another element that must be added to the simplicity equation and kept in balance with all other elements.

A sculpture class will provide you with another perspective on the human body. You will have to observe a life model as a three-dimensional object and transfer what you see into a three-dimensional clay figure. By constructing a human figure, you'll learn about movement and proportional relationships, which are important when you want to pose someone for a portrait or to capture an image of a moving subject, human or animal.

A ceramics course will have a similar value to a sculpture class in that you must shape a three-dimensional object and apply an outer surface design that is simple, but artistic.

Take advantage of the many arts courses offered in your community to make significant improvements in your photography. Between classes, take what you've learned and try to use it with your camera, and then share your photos with your drawing, painting or sculpting instructor. Explain that you are attending the class to become a better photographer and ask him or her to review your images to determine if you are applying what you learned during the last class.

Chapter 19: Participate in Workshops



Photography workshops are beneficial learning experiences for thousands of aspiring photographers at every level. There are many scheduled throughout the year in hundreds of locations (even small towns) covering every conceivable concept, technique, equipment and photography genre. In addition, just as many, if not more, business seminars on sales and marketing, finances, insurance, human resources and a myriad of other topics are available to professional photographers who want to learn how to operate their businesses more efficiently and profitably.

Because of the number of workshops, seminars, presentations, etc., you must be judicious, and invest your time and money in those that have the most value for you.

Match your goal with the workshop

Start by having a clear idea of your photography goals, in general and specifically. You want to attend a workshop that matches the genre you like to shoot and to learn how to improve your skills in that genre. Finding yourself at a portrait workshop when your goal is to become a better landscape photographer is probably a waste of time and money. You may learn a few interesting pointers, but not everything the landscape workshop would have taught you.

Invest some time researching the workshops you've targeted. Most of them have Websites or literature that will make it much easier to pick the right workshop for you. Don't hesitate to ask the people conducting the workshop for a few references to contact. Typically, the best workshops are eager for you to talk to previous attendees; those that won't or can't provide you with references should be deleted from your list.

Know the workshop specifics

Your research should also help you determine how the workshop is conducted and under what conditions. You want to know in advance if you will be shooting photographs or learning in a classroom environment. Will you have the opportunity to handle and examine equipment, position lights and pose subjects or is it a theory course? You also want to be sure you are dressed and equipped appropriately, especially if you'll be shooting outdoors. As an extreme example, some workshops, such as those hosted by Visionary Wild, are often a total adventure trip: rafting the Colorado, days hiking through a desert or a jungle, etc.

Know the required experience

Another way to waste your time and money is to attend a workshop with concepts and techniques over your head. It can be equally detrimental for an advanced photographer to attend a beginner's workshop, which will not only be boring, but repetitive. Knowing whether the workshop is for beginners, intermediates or advanced amateurs or professional photographers is important to maximize its value for you.

Geared for the challenge

Make sure your research helps you determine if you must bring specific kinds of equipment to participate and benefit fully from the workshop. Don't feel as if you must buy that equipment; most every type of gear can be rented, and at very affordable rates. It's another investment that will pay dividends.

Be aware of the sales pitch

There is absolutely nothing wrong with a workshop host/instructor offering books, additional workshops and other materials for sale to attendees. What you want to check is if the workshop schedules most of its time to impart good information and plenty of it or to make you part of a captured audience for sales pitches. This is another good reason to ask for and talk with references.

The real payoff

Ultimately, the purpose and primary benefit of attending a workshop is not just the information and ideas you learn, but putting those concepts and techniques into practice. To squeeze every bit of value from the time and money you invest, what you learn should be evident in the improvement of your photographic skills and output. It's also best to introduce what you learned during your very next shoot when it is still fresh in your mind and you're pumped about the experience.

You're much more likely to enjoy and learn more deeply at a workshop when you do your homework, prepare yourself for the experience and approach it with an open mind ready to learn.



Chapter 20: Create a Website

Even if your photo portfolio is mostly filled with casual pictures of family, friends, events, etc., you can still create a Website. The further you advance as a photographer the more important a Website will become; therefore, now's the time to learn the basics. Many of the best concepts and methods to use on your Website are similar to those successful professional photographers use on their sites.

Keep it simple

Create (or re-create) a Website with a simple design and easy navigation. Sure, give the home page some pizzazz and use a template design on every page that uniquely identifies the Website as yours. Avoid complex navigation, with unnecessary movement or an overly artistic concept. People are more likely to visit your site again if they can easily and quickly find the information they seek.

Energize your Website

A photography Website that slowly wheezes and moans as it appears on screen is more likely to cause visitors to choose another site. Plus, slow-loading Websites do not receive preferential treatment from search engines; in fact, they push them lower in the results.

Display high-resolution images

Fill your Website with low quality or low-resolution photos and people will avoid your site as if it had the plague. It's best to select just a few examples of your best work and display JPEGs at a high-resolution, a minimum of 800 pixels in height and width. Avoid very high-resolution images (10 MP). Apply a watermark to each to protect against copyright infringement.

Don't be "Flashy"

Avoid using the Flash application or other "flashy" displays that a Web developer may have convinced you to add to your site. The Flash application is certainly a marvelous creative tool, but it only benefits certain types of Websites; and photography sites are not one of them. To achieve a top position in search-engine results, the search engine must be able to recognize and read the text on your Website. Any text in a Website developed with Flash is unreadable by search engines, rendering your site as essentially invisible and a barely-breathing marketing tool.

Reveal your location



Potential customers will obviously have difficulty determining if your photography services can serve their needs unless they know where you are located. Although this method applies predominately to professionals, such as wedding photographers, who work within a specific geographic location, you can never be sure who will visit your Website. Someone may want to hire you to shoot photos of places that are exclusive to your area, or maybe he or she needs a local contact or scout to find locations in your area where they will be shooting.

Make it easy to contact you

A contact-information page should be a major navigation tab on every page someone might visit on your Website. At a minimum, it should contain your email address and phone number; however, the more ways people can contact you and the easier you make it for them will generate the most traffic to your business. Better yet, create an email contact form, so you can ask interested parties for their contact information and to describe how you can serve them, specifically. This form should also be accessible via a link on every page, and

prominently displayed.

Be a blogger

As stated above, search engines need text to recognize your site and give it a great position in search results. This text, however, shouldn't be limited to brief introductory copy on the various pages or short descriptions of the photos in your portfolio. You need a blog, where you post articles, comments and observations on a regular basis: once a week, three times a week, etc. As your blog grows, your search-results position should improve. Much more can be revealed about you and the type of photographer you are through a blog than just a portfolio of images.

Chapter 21: Learn How to Use Social Media

You may already have a Facebook, Pinterest, Google+ and/or Tumblr page and a Twitter address and you share photographs with family members and friends regularly. Spend some time, however, learning how and why the Internet is a critical tool for successful photographers. Understand how social networking sites are used to market photography and photographers.

Photography has contributed greatly to making connections between people that didn't previously exist because photography is a universal language that speaks to everyone, regardless of background, education or location in the world. Whether you're a beginner, serious enthusiast or a seasoned professional, sharing your photography via social media sites gives anyone who views your work a peek inside your world and how you perceive the places you live, work, play and travel. It's often a much better statement about you than any words could describe.

For the amateur photographer, the benefit of social media is to know you're not alone in your pursuit to improve your skills and results. It's an opportunity to find like-minded people who share your photographic interests, vision and level of experience. You might say social media is like a therapy session where you are apt to learn as much, if not more, about yourself than others. It's also a classroom where there is usually someone that knows a bit more than you do and has a bit more experience. Because he or she has chosen to be social, he or she is more likely to be willing to share the additional knowledge you don't have that will allow you to take the next step forward as a photographer.

Social media is also a leveraging tool for the amateur with a goal to become a professional. Not only do you have much more to learn, but also you need as much feedback as possible about the quality of your photos and, maybe more importantly, their commercial value in the real-world marketplace. Only through social media can you expect to obtain a broad range of reviews and criticism of your work. Social media can also be an important source to find the right mentor for counsel and advice about how to become, act and succeed as a professional.

For the semi-professional or professional, social media can be leveraged for marketing purposes, much the same as any large or small business. It can be particularly beneficial for marketing a new or established photography business. Traditional media is too expensive and widely dispersed, while social media, when used correctly, can be very targeted and costs very little compared to a newspaper ad, TV spot or even printed marketing materials.

To be competitive, a professional must provide customers with a Website to view the proofs of their photo shoots, and even order prints. Successful pros take it one step further by using social media to start and maintain a dialogue with customers and prospective customers to generate new and repeat business, to ask and obtain testimonials and referrals and to keep everyone informed of new products, services and capabilities.

Consider the following ideas and tips to help you leverage social media and receive its many benefits.

Choose the Right Site or Sites

All social media sites may have the same common goal of bringing people together, but each works slightly different and affects participants differently too. As an amateur, Facebook has been (and continues to be) the largest site to reach a general audience; but Twitter has quickly grown in significance and an easier way to share photos quickly. For professionals, it may be necessary to use all the major social media sites because customers or potential customers aren't all on Facebook or Google+, exclusively. You must be able to communicate with your particular niche in the marketplace wherever they may be, or go.

Be Active

You won't achieve much, whether you have amateur or professional goals, if you're not an active social media participant. Make social media a regular part of your schedule, especially if you're a professional. Nothing's worse than starting a dialogue with people, customers and prospects, in particular, and then not continuing it. Professional photographers should schedule time weekly or throughout the week for social media tasks. It might help to think of this time as the marketing portion of your business schedule, which would be necessary even if social media didn't exist.

Be Professional

Professional photographers must learn how to use social media as a professional tool, not just the casual communications of amateurs who share their pictures with family members and friends. This doesn't mean the professional must be formal and refer to himself or herself in the third person. The friendly environment of social media is definitely an advantage for the professional, but the reasons to connect with people must be driven by business requirements, not just off-handed messages that serve no commercial purpose.

Be Aware of New Social Media Opportunities

The online world is ever changing, never stagnant; so it's vital to remain as current as possible about the expansion and evolution of social media. What seems to attract everyone today could change dramatically and quickly.

Chapter 22: Enter Photo Contests



There are photo contests for every level of photographer and any kind of photography. You can start entering photo contests almost as soon as you start taking pictures with any kind of camera. Even if your entry is a picture of your dog, it's a good learning experience. You'll be more likely to succeed if you follow these steps.

Judge Yourself

If you can't be self-critical, and even downright brutal, about the photos you are considering as contest entries, then you aren't much of a photographer. Photography is a bit like sports: your primary competitor is you; and if you can beat yourself, then you're apt to create images that will be winners.

This honesty begins by eliminating the images with the fundamental flaws, such as soft focus, bad lighting, poor contrast, bloomed highlights and dense, impenetrable shadows. If your photos easily reveal that you don't have good command of the basic concepts of photography, then you need more learning and practice before entering photo contests.

Even if you think you can be objective about the quality of your photos, ask others, photographers and non-photographers, their opinions. You may save yourself an entry fee and/or discover that an image you were ready to discard receives broad approval.

Winning at the Margins

Yes, you're entering a landscape photography contest and all the entries you want to submit are clearly landscapes. Congratulations! That is not what will attract the attention of the judges, however. They're looking at the small details: if you had lowered the camera a foot for this shot, it would have been a finalist. If you had studied the ambient light more carefully, then you would have known to stand in a better place. You cropped an image too tight and lost the subtle and pleasing balance of a small object in contrast with a panoramic scene.

One judge (who had to be tickled violently to spill the beans) said he often looks through all the entries to determine if the submissions, in total, are strong. If that is the case, then he is much tougher when judging each photo's small details. Conversely, if the category is weak, then he is more forgiving. Of course, you can't know which it will be, which is all the more reason to concentrate on the small details of your photos.

Know the Contest Specifics

Many photographers never read their equipment manuals, so it shouldn't be any surprise that many also fail to read (carefully) contest rules and procedures and category descriptions. You could lose a photo contest by simply submitting a great photo in the wrong category. Here is another opportunity to ask the opinions of others as to whether your submission belongs in the category you think it does.

Strive for Originality

One of the best methods for improving your photography is purposely trying to copy the great photos of the great photographers; but this is only an educational tool, not a photo contest strategy. Judges see through this ploy quite easily and most won't give your submissions a second thought or look, regardless of how well you emulated the masters. Learn from the greats to be better, but travel your own road to greatness by being as original as possible.

Fads Are for the Feeble

Photography like any art form goes through cycles (also much like fashion), with a specific technique or subject matter as the hot, new creative statement. This also refers to the originality issue. Regardless of how well you've used a tilt-and-shift lens, for example, or whatever is the current trendy piece of equipment, it will be difficult for any contest judge to select your image if you're just following the crowd in the latest direction.

Judges don't like to be hit over the head with a photographic fad, but they do take a positive attitude toward contest participants who are able to use the trendy equipment or portray the hot subject matter in creative and subtle ways.

Beware of the Black-and-White Trap

What irks many photo contest judges is photographers who think they can score points by simply changing color photos to black and white. You could score points if there is a very good reason for making the conversion, such as emphasizing the message or story of your image. Here is another opportunity to ask the opinions of your photo buddies before taking this often-fatal step.

Quality vs. Subject Matter

A technically flawed photo of great subject matter receives very little consideration from photo contest judges. It's so easy to be overwhelmed by the beauty and majesty of a landscape or an amazing pet trick, focusing all your attention on capturing an once-in-a-lifetime image, but forgetting to compose/create a quality image.

Create an "Ah-ha" Moment

Photo quality is the biggest weapon you can wield in a photo contest. If you can evoke an "ah-ha" moment in the judges, causing them to stop and stare at your photo with genuine wonder, then you've increased the odds of winning, significantly.

Objectively Subjective

The bottom line of any photo contest is that the judges, despite their photography skills, experience and achievements, will still select finalists and winners from their personal perspective. A photograph that is barely given a glance during one contest could be a winner in another, so don't take the judges' subjectivity as a consensus on the quality of your photos or your skills. Once the finalists and/or winners are published, compare your photo to them and learn from the comparison. If you still like your image, then enter it another contest; or take what you've learned and reshoot the photo to give it that extra oomph to make it a winner.

Chapter 23: Consider Formal Education

Many of today's best photographers are graduates of photography schools. Obviously, it's a stimulating environment, but it is also where you learn techniques and how to refine them into a style. You may be a young person: high school student, college student or military veteran. You've decided to pursue a career in photography, video, film or other visual arts. You also understand that a formal education in photography is essential to reach your goal. Congratulations! You've made some of the first important decisions in your young life; however, now the work begins.

From the moment you decide you want to be a professional photographer, with the boost of a degree in photography, you must begin to prepare for your formal education and your career beyond graduation day. One of the first lessons of professionalism that you can learn immediately is that when a professional person targets a goal, he or she starts to pursue it with the next breath.

For example, you're a high school student, and during your junior year you decide to enroll in a photography-degree program upon graduation. You now have a year or more to lay the foundation for your advanced studies before the first day of college...and you should use it!



If you've made such a decision, then photography has probably been an interest, even a passion, of yours for some years. One of the biggest challenges of a college-level photography program is the advanced skills and techniques you'll be expected to develop, and be able to use.

You can prepare yourself for this challenge before you face it by learning the next level of photography techniques beyond what you already know. For example, if you're lighting experience is limited to an on-camera flash, then learn off-camera techniques and how to use the three-light concept in a studio setting.

Broaden your photography experience. Most of your photos may be casual images of family members and friends or you may shoot for your school newspaper or Website. Now's the time to start to learn and experience other forms of photography. Make a list of three to five types of photography you've never shot: portraits, nature, sports, urban, landscapes, products, macro, fashion, etc.

Then, schedule a few hours every week to expand your photography experience. Spend some of this time on the Web learning about these other types of photography from the experts. Visit photography Websites, such as PhotographyTalk.com, the Websites of professionals, and blogs and video tutorials.

Enter student photography contests. The sooner you understand that professional photography is a competitive career the better. Much of the success of your career will depend on others—employer, photo editor, fashion designer, magazine publishers, etc.—deciding to give you an assignment or buy your photos instead of other photographers. Participating in photography contests now will prepare you for that future.

There are photo contests for every level of photographer and any kind of photography, and special categories for students. Even if your entry is a picture of your dog, it's a competitive learning experience that allows you to see how your work compares to other photographers.

Another opportunity to gain additional experience and prepare for your college photography education is to volunteer your photography services to non-profit, charitable or community organizations. You'll learn how to interact with a "client," understand exactly what photos he or she wants and deliver them, plan and schedule your time for the assignment, etc.

Maybe, the ultimate experience in preparation for a formal education in photography is becoming an intern to a local photographer during the summer or between semesters.

The primary benefit of an internship is to observe how a professional works, in all aspects of his or her business. Consider your internship as a laboratory, where you discover the formula a professional uses to balance photography with all of the demands of operating a business.

Another excellent preparatory step is finding a mentor. He or she is a professional photographer who is willing to spend some time with you to help you advance your skills. If you have the opportunity to be an intern to a photographer, then ask him or her to continue your relationship beyond the internship period. Your mentor doesn't have to be a local photographer, thanks to the Internet. You can develop a relationship with a professional online who's located anywhere.

Spend some of your time studying current photographers. Much of this you can do online; however, also visit galleries, where viewing prints is a totally different experience than browsing through them on the Internet. Seeing photographs in the printed medium speaks to your brain very differently and will expand your knowledge about how success is defined photographically.

If you've decided to pursue a degree in photography, then a very important step is choosing the right college. This begins, of course, with researching traditional universities with photography programs and photography-only schools. Educational

institutions that are solely focused on providing the finest photography and visual arts educations are likely your better choice if you want the straightest path to a career in photography.



Chapter 24: Leaders Are Readers

Did You Know... Research has proven again and again that the difference between success and a mediocre existence may be as simple as the number of books you read per year. The great and powerful entrepreneurs, heads of business and government and leaders of important social movements read a minimum of 10 books a year, and often many more, while the average among the remainder of the population is only 1 book per year.

To achieve success in any field, interest or career, including photography, the first lesson is that education is a lifelong pursuit and responsibility. To put it simply: you can't acquire too much knowledge; in fact, none of us live long enough to acquire as much as we should. Worse yet, too many of us are all too happy to stop educating ourselves as soon as we are no longer required to attend school.

Regardless of how well you excelled during your formal education, it was only the rudiments, the most basic bits of knowledge. It's a foundation that expects to have an entire structure of knowledge built upon it. As with photography or your career, as you advance and acquire some experience, there will be only more to learn if you expect to take the next step to success.

The practical step to becoming more of a reader and, therefore, more of a leader and a success is to develop an annual plan of books to read. You want your reading list to be a balance of titles from a number of different groups.

Photography Books

Since the topic at hand is succeeding at photography, the group of books at the top of your annual reading list should be photography. These could include:

- Cameras: specific brands and models
- Technical, "How-to": exposure, white balance, etc.
- Lighting: flash, studio, gear, effects, etc.
- Compositional: framing, depth-of-field, element and color balance, etc.
- Editing software
- Printing, mounting and display
- Works of great photographers
- Biographies of famous photographers

Personal Development Books

Whatever your pursuits or interests in life, your likelihood of success is also dependent on you, the person. Developing qualities, such as confidence, self-esteem, integrity and others, give you more control over your drive for success and prepares your mind and personality for the challenges, setbacks and hard work that will be required to become a successful photographer. The bookstores and the Internet are filled with virtually endless choices of personal development books, materials and seminars to attend in person or via DVD, podcast or YouTube video.

Do a bit of research first to find those writers and speakers who have genuine information and ideas to help foster your



personal development, and that match with your goals.

Business and Marketing Books

If you aspire to become a professional photographer or even a part-timer, as a second job, then achieving success at that level requires business and marketing knowledge. Again, the bookstores and the Internet are filled with books and information in other forms and media on these two enormous subjects. Again, find one or more sources that are focused on helping the small business owner, the fledgling entrepreneur.

Not only do you want practical knowledge about how to operate a business, but also you should learn about human resources and managing a staff. Understanding how to market yourself and your photography business is the ultimate key to succeeding as a money-earning photographer. You don't have to become an expert, but you should understand how to identify and communicate with the primary audience for your services and the best media and methods to grab and hold clients for the long term.

General Knowledge Books

What you learned in school about history, science, mathematics, geography, language and the arts was only the bare essentials. Probably, more than 90 percent of what is known about these subjects is not taught in school. To succeed as a person and a photographer requires a willingness to continue learning these subjects.

- Operating a camera and the technical concepts of photography IS science.
- Calculating exposures, focusing distances and lighting setups IS mathematics.
- Succeeding at landscape photography requires knowledge of geography and even geology.
- The best wildlife photographers have much knowledge about the behavior of the animals they are trying to capture in images.
- Even as a casual world traveler, knowledge of local history, culture and language can make a huge difference in the quality of the photos you shoot.
- Professionals shooting in exotic locations or among the people of isolated cultures absolutely must have intimate knowledge of their subject matter if they expect to complete their assignments successfully.
- Interest in macro photography of insects? Then, you better start reading entomology.

Chapter 25: Develop the Persona of a Professional

Whether your goal is to be an excellent serious amateur or start a photography business, understanding what it means to be a professional, and then acting as such, will definitely help you succeed.

The following 8 professional qualities are not just reminders for practicing pros, but also are goals for amateurs and students that aspire to be pros or simply want to be better, well-rounded photographers and individuals. The list is not inclusive; there may be other important professional qualities that should become part of who you are and how you conduct your photography business.

1. It's difficult to declare any one quality as the most important, but integrity is certainly a candidate. Integrity is often the measure of one's honesty and how fairly he or she deals with others, especially in a business setting. When you make an agreement, you honor it thoroughly and seriously. You simply do what you say you will do. Integrity also relates to knowing what is right and wrong, as a professional and human being, and acting accordingly. You must also have

integrity with yourself, meaning you are steadfast in your thinking and convictions and have a personal philosophy that is the basis of who you are and how you interact with others and the world.

2. For others to recognize your integrity and benefit from it requires discipline on your part. You must have the self-control and stick-to-itiveness to do what must be done and on schedule, even in lieu of your personal life. Discipline also relates to setting, pursuing and accomplishing your professional, personal and financial goals.
3. Discipline is closely aligned with the quality of perseverance. You may receive a great amount of pleasure and satisfaction from operating a photography business; it's not a job, but your passion. It's also a daily battle of competition that does have its victims, so you must develop a warrior's mentality inside, but a gentle, professional nature on the outside. Despite your skills, experience and reputation, you must have a grim determination to maintain them and protect them, and take your rightful place among the professional photographers who are successful.
4. Confidence is a professional quality that drives success. Your professional/personal philosophy should leave no doubt as to your ability, both as a photographer and small business owner, to reach your goals as you also help your clients reach theirs. For some, the difficulty with confidence is not to become over-confident and especially display it to the rest of the world. Your confidence should appear as natural as your smile; it's there for all to see, but it doesn't intrude on your interactions with others. Professional confidence should be recognized subconsciously, for, as soon as it is forced, customers and others in your life will avoid it, and you.
5. A professional photographer is an entrepreneur. He or she doesn't just want to shoot pictures for a lifetime. He or she should also use this unique opportunity to build a business that operates effectively and efficiently and funds the needs of his or her family and the lifestyle he or she wants, today and during retirement.
6. To that end, a professional photographer must also be a student. The obvious subject matter is learning new photography techniques and equipment. An equally important area of study is business: sales and marketing, management, finances, staff training, etc. It's the combination of both that has made so many millions of small business owners successful enough to live the life they want, and independently.
7. To be a professional photographer and a successful small business owners also requires audaciousness. Not recklessness, but the willingness to make bold and daring, but calculated decisions about how you compose a photo and how you operate your business and use the revenues it produces.
8. Finally, a photographer is worthy of being considered a full-fledged professional when he or she is giving. It's not just a matter of donating a percentage of your income to your favorite charity or cause, although that is an element of giving. It's also being willing to serve as a mentor to a student photographer or a local photography club. It also means offering your photography services to specific needs in your community at no charge, such as press release photos for that favorite charity or shooting high school portraits of students from impoverished situations or homeless families.



Chapter 26: Learn Patience

Beginner and hobbyist photographers are known to spend a considerable amount of time and energy trying to determine the difference between their photos and professional-quality images. They often focus on the equipment or are driven by the opportunity to make money; but in many instances, these are not as important as learning the skill of patience.

Some people seem to be born impatient, but, in our modern world, it's more likely our culture of instant gratification (falsely created by the media in most cases) that has caused many people to be unwilling to wait and allow an opportunity to develop. This phenomenon is certainly applicable to photography, and is the creative tool professionals understand, but is often lacking from the approach of the amateur.

Except in the controlled environment of the studio (and often not even there) can the photographer "force" the action, the occurrence of an event or dictate when the photograph he or she wants becomes available. Most of the best photographs, with photojournalism as the most extreme example, come when they come; and the

photographer who wants to capture those high-quality images must be willing to wait for all the elements to combine perfectly before releasing the shutter.

How often have you, as an amateur, or during your observations of other amateur photographers, started snapping pictures as soon as you reached a destination or a location where you hoped to capture outstanding photos? It's a common practice and immediately reveals who is the amateur and who is the pro.

You can reverse this tendency with some practical tips and a bit of work on your mindset.

Make photography a separate world

Impatience may rule the rest of your life, and it may be difficult to be patient in a competitive world that demands instant action and results, but try to develop a different mindset during your photography sessions. Learn how to evoke some inner calmness and make photography an exercise in patience. Slow your mind and take the time to be observant and become part of the scene or subject you want to photograph.

Patience comes with preparation

When you select a location to photograph, spend some quality time visiting it prior to your actual photo session. You may even want to leave your camera at home or in your bag. Simply watch what happens during a substantial amount of time, and possibly take a few notes. For example, you want to capture the beauty of a particular natural scene. Knowing what occurs there during certain times of the day will allow you to schedule your shoot at the most advantageous moments. Wildlife is more likely to become part of your images if you shoot during the early morning and late afternoon. The light is also typically better during those "magic hours" of the day.

Advanced scouting will also help you determine exactly what equipment you need, so you aren't burdening yourself with unnecessary gear, or discovering you didn't bring an essential piece of equipment.

Be comfortable

Photographic patience doesn't mean you must be miserable as you wait for the right moments. Scouting your targeted location will also help you wear the right clothing for the weather, a hat and sunblock to protect your from UV rays, plenty of water and maybe even a campstool. Just because you're prepared doesn't mean the action or light will be exactly what you want as soon as you set up your equipment. Part of your gear selection should include a tripod, so you don't have to hold your camera in a ready position for hours.



Maintain control of exposure settings

A good reason to bring your camera during your location scouting is to make some test meter readings, so you have some idea what exposure settings will be best during your shoot. Then, when you do set up your gear, shoot in the M, or manual, mode, so you maintain control of exposure instead of your camera.

Be flexible

Don't be so focused on your advanced planning that you fail to be flexible if conditions change. Patience isn't just waiting for the images you've envisioned, but also being willing to wait for surprises. For example,

that late afternoon period may offer the best light or the possibility of wildlife for your nature photos, but it may also be advantageous to remain patient and stay at that location into twilight. A whole new palette of images may present themselves after the sun is below the horizon, but is still lighting the sky and the scene.

You may discover that developing a patient approach to your photography has a positive effect on the rest of your life, allowing you to practice patience and enjoying more of what life has to offer.

Chapter 27: Schedule Regular Time with Your Camera

As a famous writer once said, "A writer writes," so a photographer photographs. If you expect to succeed as a photographer, then you must make it a habit, a regularly part of your daily or weekly schedule. Success in photography is similar to success in tennis or golf: You must hit millions of balls before you have the skills to succeed. You must shoot at least thousands of photos before you can expect to improve and become a successful photographer.

Photography for many is a respite from the hassles and busyness of the day. It's a creative hobby that allows you to use a different part of your brain, which is relaxing and enjoyable. The challenge is to find the time in your busy schedule to be with your camera. Just the two of you together, recording whatever you see in the world.

No more excuses!

You can't expect to find or create time for photography during your day or week unless you first re-adjust your mindset. Photographers that improve their skills and produce excellent images are those that are compulsively driven to shoot. They refuse to allow barriers of any kind to stop them from pursuing their photographic goals. That's the kind of positive, confident mindset you must develop. Then, when you do find the time, there can be no excuses for failing to use it wisely.

- **Weather and light:** Great photos are found in every weather and light condition, sometimes the best. Dress for the weather, protect your camera and march into the elements with the mindset that you will capture your greatest image ever.
- **Subject matter:** Part of developing your photographer's eye is seeing interesting images everywhere because they are there.
- **Limited equipment:** Even the most meager camera (including a cell phone) has the technology to produce good photos. The important ingredient is not allowing yourself to be limited by your equipment.

Excuses are barriers you erect yourself; reasons are often related to responsibilities that can't be overlooked. Spending time with your family, transporting your kids to and from their activities and a long list of other daily tasks must obviously have priority over photography. Doing a better job prioritizing these responsibilities and tasks is often the first step to revealing the time you can allocate to yourself. You may have to forego another activity or hobby today, or this week, to give photography the priority.

Make your camera your constant companion

Schedules and priority lists are not absolutes. Suddenly, you have time to shoot when you didn't expect it...and you left your camera at home! Thinking that your DSLR is too bulky and heavy to carry to work everyday is just another excuse. Who knows what events and scenes will occur that you can capture because your camera is with you, and ready? Even the few minutes you might have to shoot a few images are better than nothing. Another benefit of always carrying your camera is scouting shots. You might be able to record a scene or object quickly, and then return at another time to shoot it more correctly and completely.

Start now!

You've found the time to read this PhotographyTalk.com e-book chapter. Once you have, use that same amount of time to rise from your chair, grab your camera and go shoot something, even if it is in the same room where you are reading this book. This tip is less about capturing a "keeper" than motivating you to start now, which, if you continue, will become a habit.

Less is more

You won't need as much editing time at the computer and you'll take better photos when you are more deliberate about those you do take. One ironic fault of digital photography is that it makes it too easy for too many photographers to record too many images. The secret is to spend more time observing and moving around a scene or object than just pointing and shooting at everything in sight. Look for the unique angle or cast of light. It may actually be better to shoot that scene or object during a different time of day. Bring home a few excellent images instead of hundreds and what little photography time you have will be more productive; and you won't have to find more hours to devote to organizing and editing on the computer.

JPEGs are time savers

Shooting RAW files is preferred by many (if not most) photographers, simply because a RAW file includes all the data of an image. This is especially beneficial when editing that image. It may seem crazy, but you may find more time for photography if you shoot JPEG instead of RAW files. You will gain the time you would have spent converting and exporting RAW files. Just as there must be some give-and-take in your daily schedule, you may have to trade editing limitations for time to shoot.

Learn and use time management principles

The time you want for photography may actually be in your schedule. You may not know it, however, because you don't manage any of your time very well. The Internet and the bookstores are filled with information and practical tips about time management. This is not just a concept for busy executives; it applies to everyone. Investing some time in educating yourself and applying some time-management techniques is likely to make your entire life less hectic and reveal the time available for photography and other activities and tasks.

Chapter 28: Include the Family

Does your spouse give you the “evil eye” every time you try to sneak from the house with your camera for a bit of photography on your own? Have you’re kids forgotten your name because you spend more time with your camera and editing photos on your computer than with them? These are all sure signs that photography is more of a priority than quality



family time...and these signs are bright red with warning. You can improve your skills and spend more time with your family when you combine photography and family activities.

You may already be photographing birthday parties, holidays and vacations; they could be some of the major reasons you bought a digital camera. More importantly, these are also opportunities to try new techniques and types of photography that include your family members, without them becoming just more “snapshot” sessions.

Pack your camera and the car with the family and head to the neighborhood park, local municipal park, nearby state park or entertainment venue. Announce earlier during the week that next weekend will be a family camping trip...if everyone finishes his or her homework and chores! You’re immediately a hero! This will

provide you with many opportunities to capture those casual photos of the family that grandparents, aunts, uncles and cousins want to see. The photographic benefit for you is now you have a number of ready-made subjects available to expand your picture-taking repertoire and the quality of your photos.

Your first opportunity is to use the activity as a way to learn how to tell a story with pictures. Pretend you’re a photojournalist with an assignment from a family magazine. Be ready to capture the excitement on your kids’ faces when you first announce the trip (and your spouse’s approval). Then, take photos of your kids packing and loading the car. You can continue to shoot pictures throughout the day or weekend that add to the chronology of your family story, instead of a bunch of random images that don’t seem to be related. Have each kid keep a little journal of the trip, and then use what he or she writes to create a family story photo album.

Of course, you’ll want to shoot casual photos of your family members during the day or weekend trip; but also take the opportunity to “use” them as portrait subjects. You can practice posing them and positioning your camera creatively to record semi-formal or planned portraits. Photograph everyone individually and in groups. Kids, of course, often won’t sit still for a long portrait session...and you’re supposed to be having fun together. Do a little scouting and planning to find interesting environments for family portraits, and then shoot the actual pictures during brief, 15-minute sessions. You don’t want family members to think you just planned the activity to use them as photography props.

That being said, you can use them as props in wider landscape photos. They aren’t necessarily recognizable in the picture, but you position and direct them to interact with the environment/nature in a specific manner. Adding the human figure to landscape photos often enhances the overall quality of the shot. A child could be reaching into the low branches of a tree or smelling a wildflower. Another could be the only person sitting on a long row of benches on a boardwalk.

You can assure everyone is having fun by allowing your children to run, jump and scamper across the fields and through the woods, as you practice how to stop action with exposure techniques and the auto-focus system in your camera. Read one or more PhotographyTalk.com articles or other content about how to cause blur purposely and creatively when photographing moving objects/subjects.

Take advantage of being outdoors all day or an entire weekend by shooting photos of your family during all the time periods of the day. Dawn, dusk and twilight typically provide more creative shooting opportunities than the bright light of midday. The soft, subtle light during these periods will allow you to capture a quality of portraits and landscapes that may have been lacking from your portfolio.

This is also opportunity to learn how to use reflectors outdoors to control the direction of the bright sunlight and off-camera flash techniques to fill dark areas with light. You’ll discover many kinds of photos that will probably be completely new to you.

Finally, quality family time is always an opportunity to teach your children. Spend a few minutes with each of your children and explain why you had him or her pose a certain way or how you used light creatively. Who knows, you may have a junior photographer who's a natural just waiting to experience the same passion you do for photography. There are few better ways to connect with a child and develop a shared interest in a hobby you can do together. Plus, it's guaranteed to transform the spouse's evil eye into a loving look.

Chapter 29: Challenge Yourself



Don't limit your photography experience to one or a few kinds of photography. Pictures of your family and friends (and pets) are important, but you want to try your hand at landscapes, nature close-ups, street photography, sports and all the other many other forms. Again, one of these experiences may be the source of your passion and developing your photographer's mind and eye.

Whether you're a photography hobbyist, specialist or professional, taking better photos of any subject matter requires two actions on your part. First, try to make photography a regular part of every day. Generally, the more pictures you take, the better you will become. Second, learn the techniques of the photography process and how to photograph specific types of subject matter. Your goal is to achieve a balance of formal knowledge and practical experience, which is the combination that leads to success as an amateur or a pro.

Try your hand at the following 10 photography subjects that will result in you becoming a well-rounded hobbyist or a professional with the broad knowledge to serve a larger client base.

1. **Baby and Children's Photography...**Every parent and grandparent want photographs of their children and grandchildren. Hobbyists that take the time to learn baby and children's photography techniques will capture lasting memories in images that go well beyond snapshots, and reflect some of the elements of professional work. Young professional photographers, aspiring to specialize in this market, tend to be more successful when they learn from accomplished photographers in this field.
2. **Pet Photography...**For many hobbyist photographers, their pets is a close second to their children, as photography subjects. Creating a true pet portrait is much more than simply pointing the camera at Fido or Fluffy. With a bit of formal knowledge, the hobbyist will be able to capture his or her pet's personality and make the process easier and less of a hassle. Pet photography can also be a lucrative market for the professional, but only with an understanding of unique environmental, lighting and spatial techniques.
3. **People Photography...**When you make photography a daily activity, you're likely to find that many of your compositions are of people. After all, they're everywhere! Their shapes, sizes, facial features, textures, clothing and cultural identity are some of the most interesting photographic elements. Once again, however, you must have a trained eye to observe people and their behavior, and then put yourself in the best position with the proper techniques to capture memorable images.
4. **Street Photography...**Many of the people who are excellent photography subjects are found on the streets. Whether it's the quiet streets of a neighborhood or the bustling avenues of a metropolis, each offers an amazing environment for the hobbyist or professional photographer. It's the interaction of people with each other, the place and the activities occurring there that lead to the most creative and interesting images.

5. Weekend Travel Photography...One of the best opportunities for hobbyists to improve their photography is to plan a weekend getaway that is both a respite from the workweek and a new photography experience. Learning a few shooting techniques will lead to images of architecture, landmarks, nightlife and the effects of weather that your family and friends will want to see again and again.
6. Exotic Travel Photography...When you travel to faraway places filled with new visions of color, culture and people, being armed with the right techniques will help you bring home amazing images.
7. Big Game Photography...You may never travel to the Arctic, the Serengeti Plains of Africa or the jungles of the Amazon to photograph the wild creatures there; but your friends will think you have when you learn how to photograph animals in a zoo or game park, so they appear to be in their natural environment.
8. Flower Photography...Finding flowers to photograph is generally not difficult. The challenge is to capture their beauty and color in new ways. To overcome this challenge, you must learn specific techniques, relating to light, angle, lens choice and depth of field.
9. Landscape Photography...Few photographic subjects capture the attention of the general public more than landscape images. With the right guidance, you can transform your boring landscapes into spectacular photos that will truly mesmerize your family and friends.
10. Nature/Wildlife Photography...Animals, flowers and landscapes are all part of the natural world, but the secret to successful photographs is learning how to approach and work within the natural world. Metering, fill-flash, camera panning and other techniques are the tools you need to show how any wild species is integrated with its natural habitat.

Chapter 30: Find Enjoyment

Regardless of your definition of success as a photographer, it should always be an enjoyable experience. This is just as much a sign of success as the quality of your photographs.

Maybe, the greatest pitfall for any type of photographer—beginner, hobbyist and professional—is losing the element of fun. It's easy to become obsessive about capturing the best pictures at a family gathering or advancing your skills and results beyond the novice or spending hours waiting for that perfect professional image that wins awards or new, high-paying clients.

Photography, like most creative pursuits, becomes much less than what it should be or what you expected when you forget to have fun. Whenever you suddenly discover that photography is no longer fun, step back and examine your approach and the process according to the following points.

It's a learning experience

You're not born with the abilities to be a photographer; and there are certainly many concepts and techniques to learn that could fill a number of lifetimes. Even the most experienced pros will tell you that often the opportunity to be always learning drives them more than making a buck or receiving an award. Don't be discouraged if you are having trouble understanding a specific concept or seem unable to make a shooting technique work correctly. Take a deep breath and maybe shelve that concept or technique and move to another one, where you can experience some success. Achieving your photography or any of life's goals is often the key to having fun.

Be wary of the equipment bug

Like a virus, your enjoyment of photography can be overwhelmed by focusing too much on equipment, especially the items you'd like to buy. Purchasing new equipment is infectious and is often a mistaken substitute for learning how to have fun with the camera you already own. It's the same for the hobbyist and the pro: the market is full of glittering and often

remarkable gear, many of which are meant to compel you to spend money and not necessarily improve your photography or your fun.

Whenever the equipment bug bites you, take control of yourself and your wallet and take the time to consider if you actually need that gear, or simply want the latest whiz-bang item. A good method to refocus your interest is stop being emotional about what you want and become objective. Study the equipment's specifications, compare them to competitive products and ask others what they think or have experienced with that equipment. The PhotographyTalk Forum is the perfect place to do just that. Think also about the additional costs that you may incur if you buy more equipment: a larger camera bag, additional insurance, another item that may need to be repaired, etc.



Too serious by half

No doubt, photography is serious business for the professional, and even the hobbyist who is eager to produce higher quality images. That seriousness must be in balance with a feeling of enjoyment, even if the results are less than satisfactory. Do you find yourself spending your entire vacation with your eyes glued to the LCD screen on the back of your camera? As a professional, do you think you must carry every piece of equipment you own with you on every assignment? Once you recognize these signs, you have likely made the photography process a burden and not an opportunity to enjoy the world around you and the people in it.

Photos are for viewing

King Midas obsessively hoarded his wealth, unwilling to share it or even allow others to know he had it. Photography will be much more fun when you readjust your mindset and consider the photos you shoot as “community property.” Your images belong to the world, not to you. Social media makes it very easy to share your photos with not just your friends, but also people living on the other side of the world. More importantly, you can't be afraid to have your photos critiqued or receive compliments. One of the best learning opportunities for photographers of every skill level and stripe is to ask more experienced photographers to comment on their results. True professionals don't hoard advice and guidance, either, and are eager to help beginners and hobbyists have fun with their photography, as they learn.

Stick to your guns

Nothing will suck the fun from photography more than relinquishing control of your creative freedom to others, or to current fads and trends. Part of being a professional, of course, is giving one's clients what they want, and expect. The solution for the professional is to shoot both the “requirements” of the client and alternative images based on the pro's vision. Clients will often find the professional's approach better than what they are dictating. For non-professionals, it's important to develop a unique vision that reveals their true level of creativity than simply shooting what appears to be popular.

Unnecessary equipment loyalty

Canon and Nikon, specifically, as well as other brands have purposely created separate cultures for themselves, and then convinced photographers through marketing that they must choose one or the other, and remain loyal. Some manufacturers do a better job with one type of camera, lens or other equipment, while others excel at alternatives. The fun comes from knowing how to use and achieve your best results from any camera instead of thinking that the brand of camera is responsible for your creativity.



30 Steps to Become a More Successful Photographer