(Title) Creative Photography

(H1) About this Paper

Welcome to anyone who wishes to make better use of their camera and take some creative, high quality images. This paper outlines some tips, tricks and methods you can use to lift your photography beyond the snapshot.

(H1) Choosing the right Camera

An important part to creating great images that you will be happy to enlarge and hang on your wall is to have a camera that can perform the task.

The kind of camera we are talking about is most likely going to be an SLR (Single Lens Reflex) or a “System” camera that can have interchangeable lenses. Both these cameras allow full control over exposure and a host of other creative settings.

The added advantage of an SLR camera is that you can see optically through the lens via an eye piece (not only via a screen on the back). This will actually aid composition, save battery power and allow you to compose images in bright sunlight where you would normally struggle to see a back lit screen.

(H1) Choosing your Lenses

When you have an SLR or System camera you have the advantage of being able to change lenses to those of various focal lengths. Some advantages of this is you can use lenses that can take in wide vistas through to zooming in on a bird in a tree 50m away (telephoto). There is also the possibility of using other creative lenses such as Tilt/Shift and Fish Eye.

If you have the resources here is a nice kit of lenses for an enthusiastic beginner:

(H2) 50mm fixed focal length (standard lens)

This can often be a relatively cheap lens that can produce crisp, high quality images and is great to have in your kit. It is great for portraits and general photography.

(H2) Mid-Range Zoom 35-105mm (General Purpose)

This “zoom” lens can vary its focal length from a moderate wide angle to a moderate telephoto and is a very practical lens to have as a general purpose default.

(H2) Zoom 200mm (telephoto)

If the budget will allow, you can have a lot of fun with this lens. It will give you the ability to bring far away objects closer. It is also great for taking portraits where you want the subject to be in focus but the background nicely blurred.

(H2) Other Lenses

Of course the list of lenses is seemingly endless. Many people get the lens bug which leads to bigger and bigger kit bags to lug all of them around.

(H1) Choosing a Flash

There are good chances that if you are buying an “entry level” SLR or system camera then it may already come with a built in flash. This is great right! Well not really. The built in flash on most cameras is rarely powerful enough for serious photography. This means that you may end up buying an on camera (hot shoe) flash which will provide you with far greater power and flexibility.

(H1) Working in Full Auto

For the start of the creative photography journey it is best if we set the camera to fully automatic exposure. The reason for this is we wish to focus on composition tips and tricks first. It is best to initially do this without the distraction of exposure.

(H2) Benefits of working in Full Automatic Mode

You can focus solely on the subject and composition

Leaving your camera on full auto when you are not shooting is a cool idea because if you have to whip your camera out in a hurry to capture that split second image you won’t have time to muck around with exposure

(H2) Disadvantages of Full Automatic Mode

The camera does not always know best. Even the best professional models can be fooled by difficult lighting situations.

You may not get the desired effect that you can get by bending the rules and playing with exposure to get that moody or dynamic image

(H1) Creative Composition

So while we have our cameras on automatic let’s focus on composition. Instead of always placing your subject in the middle of the image, there are some simple points about how to compose an image in a more interesting way. Here are some of the standards.

(H2) Off Centre Subject

A simple concept, when photographing people, if there is something interesting in the background then offset the person in the frame slightly to make some of it visible. This often creates a more interesting image.

(H2) The Rule of Thirds

This is one of the simplest and best known rules of composition. Instead of always centering your subjects, imagine the image you are composing divided into thirds and try and place something of interest in each third. It should be noted that even empty spaces can be considered interesting when placed in the 3rd‘s rule.

(H2) Foreground Interest

When photographing landscapes, look for something interesting in the foreground as well as in the distance.

(H2) Wide and Weird

If you have a wide angle lens (28mm or smaller) then get in close to your subject. The wide angle lens will create a slightly distorted perspective which can create a more dynamic image.

(H2) Forget all the above

Well not completely. The rules above a great guidelines for starting to create interesting images. Having said that once you get your eye in you will develop a gut instinct for what works and looks good. For example sometimes, centering the image is exactly the right thing to do, if that is the effect you are trying to create.

(H1) Leaving Automatic Mode

After you have taken heaps of images to hone in your composition skills, it will be time to start experimenting with creative exposure.

(H2) The Creative Exposure Trilogy

There are three setting on your camera that control exposure

Shutter Speed

Aperture

ISO

Here are some brief explanations of what these three things are:

(H3) Shutter Speed

The shutter in your camera is a curtain made of ultra-thin, light weight metal that opens and closes at varying time frames when you press the shutter release button. How long this window remains open to let light from your lens fall onto the cameras sensor is what we refer to as the shutter speed.

Fast shutter speeds can be used in well-lit/ outdoor situations and are good for capturing on-blurred sharp images or to simply limit the amount of light entering the camera in very bright conditions.

Slow shutter speeds have to be used when there is little available light so you need a longer exposure to let the light saturate onto the sensor. Longer shutter speeds often mean you will have to steady your camera, either by bracing yourself against a wall or better still, use a tripod. This is so your images won’t be blurred.

Shutter speeds on most modern SLR cameras can range from 30 seconds to 1/4000 of a second and beyond.

(H3) Aperture

The aperture is a mechanical iris located in the lens itself. It is able to create a circular opening that can vary in size. This is another way light entering the camera can be controlled. Varying the size of the opening also controls how much of the image is rendered in sharp focus. This is a wonderful optical phenomenon that photographers take great advantage of.

Aperture values are measured in ‘f’ stops (‘F’ocal Ratio)

Aperture values can range from f1 to f22. The smaller the number the wider the aperture and therefore more light is allowed to enter the camera to make the exposure.

Very few lenses actually go down to f1 f1.2 or 1.8 is more common.

At f1.2 there will be a very narrow depth of focus whereas at f22 nearly everything near or far from the camera will be in focus.

(h3) ISO

The ISO is a rating of how sensitive the cameras sensor is to light. At ISO 100 the sensor is usually at its lowest sensitivity. ISO can go to 6400 and beyond which is extremely sensitive and would be used in very low light situations.

The trade off to using higher ISO settings is that grain or noise is introduced to the image. This means the image will not appear as clear and sharp as one taken at ISO 100.

Again ISO can also be used to create an earthy, grainy effect if desired.

(H1) Using Depth of Field

Apart from being one of the elements in creating exposure, the aperture can be used for creative effect. At f1.2 there will be a very narrow depth of focus whereas at f22 nearly everything near or far from the camera will be in focus.

Sometimes you will want as much of the image as possible to be in sharp focus in this case use an f stop closer to f11 or f16. If you want a beautifully blurred background and foreground with only the subject in focus then use an f stop closer to f2.8 or F1.2.

(H2) Best lenses for Shallow Depth of Field

Although any lens that can stop down to f1.2 will produce great shallow depth of field, a lens with a focal length of 100mm or greater will produce excellent results.

(H1) Processing Digital Images

Just like the analogue darkrooms of old, downloading the image to your computer is not the end of the process.

Modern imaging software gives you the ability to properly adjust your images to   
correct such things as:

Saturation

Contrast

Levelling the light and dark areas of your image

Colour Tone

Sharpness

Much more…

(H2) Shooting in RAW vs JPG

Your modern SLR camera can capture your images in a variety of image formats. The typical one will be .JPG which is the most popular and easy to manage image format today.

The down side about post processing this image type if that it is a “Lossy” image type in that it is designed to remove unwanted colour to allow for a smaller file size. You will not be able to post process as much without losing quality.

Most modern digital cameras allow to capture in a “RAW” file type. This file type is “Non Lossy” and can be considered as the post processed image. This file type has greater latitude for post processing without losing quality.

(H1) Printing Digital Images

One of the joys of photography is to see your image printed on professional photographic paper. It is well worth finding a professional photo lab. Landscape style images are best printed on glossy materials. Some well known papers for this purpose are Kodak Endura Metallic or Fujiflex Super Gloss. Portrait style images often prefer matt or textured surfaces.