



Photography as a Hobby

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Photography has never been easier. You no longer have to take 24 or 36 photos, send them to the chemists or photo lab, and wait for them to return printed only to find half of them are useless.

Digital photography is as easy or as technical as you wish to make it.

You can use large cameras, small cameras, expensive or cheap cameras. Lots of people simply use their mobile phone.

What you use depends on your level of interest, your budget and the quality of photograph that you require.

The majority of photos taken are never printed, lots are shared on social media sites or with friends. The majority just sit in a computer never to see the light of day. However you could have some printed, more on that later.

What to photograph depends on your interests. Most of us take holiday photos but this may be limited with Covid-19 restrictions. Family, pets, gardens, flowers, birds in the garden, changing seasons, still life, all these and more are possibilities. Try looking on line for 'photography ideas at home'. I found lots including ideas for lockdown.

When composing your photograph there are a few things you should try to remember.

- Try not to have people or the main object in the centre. Position them so that they are about a third of the way from the edge of the frame, vertically or horizontally (Rule of Thirds).
- Fill the frame with your main subject, zoom in with your lens or walk closer if necessary.
- Avoid unnecessary or distracting objects in the background. Change your position or move the subject if possible.
- When photographing people or animals focus on the eyes, these should be as sharp as possible.
- Avoid cutting off some one's head, arm etc.
- Make sure there is space in front of the subject. Don't have them moving out of the frame.
- Make sure verticals are vertical and horizons level.
- Avoid over exposing bright areas, sky etc. and avoid over dark shadows.

- If photographing a person in a window with the light behind them you could use your camera flash to fill in light on the person.
- Try not to use the camera flash as the main lighting on people's faces, it's too harsh and it will reflect in the eyes producing the unwanted red eye effect.
- Try using natural light from a window and you could also use a white card or something to reflect light onto the subject.

With outside photos most of the time you have plenty of light. However the best time for stunning shots is in the Golden Hour (The hour after sunrise or the hour before sunset). The light at this time is softer than when the sun is high in the sky. Very bright sunlight can result in over bright skies and loss of detail in light areas of the picture.

You can use the photo editing facilities in Windows to make minor adjustments to your photographs, such as lightening or darkening the whole or part of the photo, cropping to size, straitening and sharpening etc. (Apple computers will also have similar facilities). Professional and keen photographers use sophisticated computer software to make adjustments to their photos.

Now you have your pictures taken why not have some printed, that's when they really look like photographs. The majority of home printers will make a decent job of printing a photograph provided you use photo printing paper suitable for your make of machine. However the correct setting up of the printer is necessary. You could get prints done at a photo lab or well known camera shops.

Other options are making your own Calendars or Albums of holidays, special events etc. If you look online there are many firms doing this at reasonable prices. The results are very good and a vast improvement over sticking photos in a bulky album as in the old days.

What is the best camera? It is often said the best one is the one you have with you. When you see a great shot you need to take it, if that is your phone then so be it. However to get the best results you need to know how to control it so make sure you are familiar with the operating instructions. The adjustments on a phone may be limited compared to a modern camera.

Cameras often have scene modes enabling you to set it to a selected scene: Portrait or Landscape etc. The camera will be set to the best settings for that shot. There will also be a completely automatic setting where you simply point and shoot.

No need to worry about focus in the majority of cases as you point at the subject and press the shutter half way and it is done for you.

To have more control over the way your photo will look there are other controls:

- The aperture (the size of the hole in the lens measured in f numbers) can be adjusted. If the aperture is large it lets in more light. It also reduces the depth of field and helps to blur the background therefore making the main subject stand out. A small aperture makes more of the background in focus.
- The speed of the shutter can be adjusted. A fast speed lets in less light, a slow speed more light.
- The sensitivity of the sensor in the camera can be altered (ISO setting)

Control over these three settings Aperture, Speed and ISO is necessary to achieve the correct exposure for the photograph.

Some cameras have interchangeable lenses to give you more control over the photograph you are taking.

- A Macro lens is for fine detail of very small things like insects, flowers etc.
- A Wide Angle lens gives you a broader field of view, you get more in the shot.
- A Standard lens usually has a similar view to the human eye (this is what will come with the camera).
- A Telephoto lens is longer and enlarges things, or brings them closer (good for wildlife etc.)

Using a longer lens emphasises any shake or movement you may make. You therefore need to be as still as possible. Use a faster speed, a 200 mm lens needs a speed of 200th of a second. A 500mm lens 500th of a second and so on.

Most cameras will have some sort of image stabilization to help reduce shake. Another way is to hold the camera on a tripod or rest it on something steady. If your camera has a viewfinder using it rather than looking at the screen on the back will help you hold the camera still.

Megapixels! More may be better but not always so, less pixels on a larger sensor could be better.

- Digital single lens reflex cameras (DSLR) have sensor sizes as follows.
- Full Frame (same size as 35mm film. However this is expensive. APSC is a smaller sensor and costs less.

Some cameras have smaller sensors such as Four Thirds and One Inch. Phones have even smaller sensors. These sizes can be confusing but the smaller the sensor the cheaper it is. The quality of the photo is usually better and capable of being blown up to a larger size from a larger sensor.

The Memory Card is where your camera stores the information for the photos. These come in different capacities. You don't need to fill it up before downloading to a computer, in fact it is a good idea to download after a photo shoot and then you have another copy of your pictures safely stored. I say safely, eventually your storage system will fail. It is a good idea to have all your important data backed up to another external hard drive or other storage system such as cloud storage just to be safe.

If you fancy trying photography there are of course many books on the subject. One I like for beginners is 'How to Photograph Absolutely Everything' by Tom Ang.

You can find endless information on line. A site I found recently and ideal for newcomers to photography is www.shutterfly.com/ideas/photography-for-beginners/