

TAKING PICTURES

1. Be sure your picture has a point of interest.

Each picture should have one principal idea or point of interest. That is, the eye of someone looking at the picture should, at a glance, understand what the picture is about — it's a landscape, it's a portrait, it's a ...

When viewers get confused and want to ask, "What is this picture about?" it suggests there is no point of interest or the point of interest is lost in other clutter in the picture.

Sometimes cropping a picture will help to make the point of interest clear, but it is best to take pictures in a way that make the point of interest clear to viewers



Ansel Adams once said, "There is nothing worse than a sharp image of a fuzzy concept."



2. Pay attention to the background; avoid messy backgrounds that distract from your main subject.

It is easy when concentrating on the main subject of your picture to forget about what else your camera is seeing. Try to take the time to see what else is in the picture and adjust accordingly — zoom in, turn the camera slightly, move and take the picture from a different angle, wait a moment or two— to avoid including things that will distract from your main subject. Sometimes you can correct some problems at home, often by cropping, but it is better to avoid them in the first place.

In the picture to the left there are so many people that it is hard to find a particular point of interest. Cropping the picture, as shown below is likely to produce more interesting images.





This pictures of dancers would be stronger if the background were simpler. As it is the dancers tend to get lost in the clutter behind them.



This picture is so busy in the background that it is hard to concentrate on the young children jumping from rock to rock.

3. A picture from the side or other angle can be better than straight on.

Sometimes a picture is best taken straight on, but there are many cases where moving to

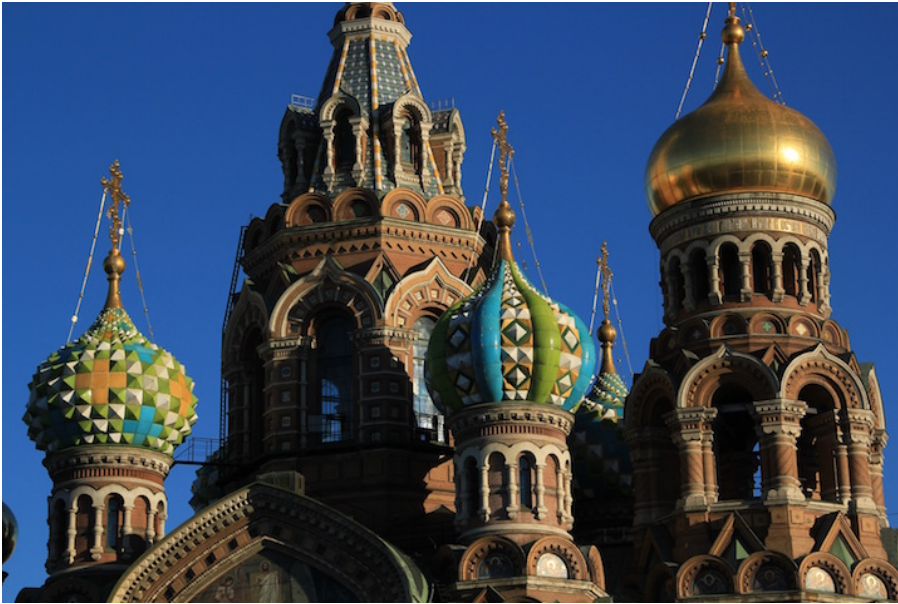


the side will produce a better picture. For example, a picture from the side of a building or monument may have angles and lines that make the picture more interesting and help to draw the viewer's eye into the picture. With regard to portraits, some people will tense up when looking directly at the camera but will be more relaxed if looking off to the side.



4. Less may be better than more

Don't always back off to fit the entire subject into your photo. Often a small part can be more interesting photographically than the whole. Zoom in on architectural details rather than always including the whole building; try head shots in addition to full-figure portraits; cut the horizon out of some of your landscape shots.





5. Remember the rule of thirds

The rule of thirds traces back to the late 18th century. It suggests that painters and photographers should consider a tic-tac-toe grid and place items of main interest at the interior intersections or along one of the vertical or horizontal axes. Many digital cameras will display this sort of grid on the viewfinder when you are taking pictures. The grid will not be part of the picture, but it can help you organize the picture.

Like any rule there will be times when you want to break it, but it works in many situations.



6. Avoid sloping horizons.

When people see a landscape picture, they expect the horizon, e.g., the edge of the ocean or a lake, to be flat not sloping. If you are not careful it is easy to concentrate on other parts of your picture and end up with a sloping horizon. When there is a clear horizon (or other strong horizontal element), try to remember to keep it horizontal or rotate and crop your picture when you get home to end up with a flat horizon.



7. Know where the sun is; usually you want to avoid shooting into the sun.



For the vast majority of pictures it is best if the sun is to your side or partially, but not entirely, behind you.

If you are shooting into the sun, it is such a strong source of light it can create deep shadows that obscure what you are trying to photograph or it can wash out a large portion of your picture.



For certain kinds of subjects, however, such as flowers or leaves, back-lighting may work best. If you must shoot into the sun, be sure your lens is shaded.

Shooting directly away from the sun is generally to be avoided as well; the lack of shadows will make your picture will look flat.

If you are able to choose the time of day, early morning and late afternoon yield warmer colors and more dramatic shadows than other times.

Sometimes we have no choice — the sun is in a bad place but the group is only stopping for a short time and then gets back on the bus. Try to make the best of the situation.



In the picture on the left the sun is so strong that it distracts from the major point of interest. Cropping out the sun as shown on the right may be the best one can do.

8. Close up pictures of people are more engaging if their eyes are directed to the camera.



9. When you get home, cull ruthlessly

Remember the days of slides? The film and developing was expensive so we took one picture, had little idea how it would turn out and moved one. With digital cameras, you get to see your results immediately and a reasonably sized memory card can hold thousands of pictures.

It makes sense that most people now take lots of pictures including many duplicates (the sun is better, that woman walked into my picture, the first picture was out of focus).

Even though you get to see your picture right after you take it, the frame on your camera is very small and what looks sharp and in focus on the camera may be anything but when you get home.

When you are able to review your pictures on your computer, discard all of the not so good pictures and keep only those you really like. Imagine you are looking at some one else's pictures and keep only those of strong interest.

10. Always carry an extra battery and memory card

One always hates to miss a picture because the camera battery dies or the memory card is full. It always helps to carry extras. Camera batteries and memory cards are quite small and easily fit in a pocket, purse or backpack. Better to carry the extra ounces of weight than miss the best picture of the day.

Many digital cameras use a proprietary battery, i.e., a specially shaped battery that comes with the name of the camera maker. These batteries usually cost a lot but hold a charge for a long time, so the temptation is not to carry a spare battery. Batteries from third party vendors are often much less expensive and will usually last until you can recharge the proprietary battery.

As for charging batteries, most chargers work on 110 and 220 volt systems, so if you are traveling abroad, you only need a plug adaptor and do not have to worry about a heavy voltage transformer.



11. Do not buy too much camera for your level of experience and interest

Professional photographers and very serious amateurs use cameras and lenses that cost thousands of dollars. These cameras take wonderful pictures IF you know how to use them (note the big IF). A number of Photo Club members use such cameras but other members take terrific pictures with cameras that cost much less, often \$200 to \$500, and weigh much less. Today there are cell phones with terrific cameras that also let you take wonderful pictures.

Taking good pictures is often about paying attention to the points above as it is about equipment.

Start small and then grow into more expensive equipment as your interest grows.

12. The best camera is the one you have with you

You can not take a picture with a camera you left behind. You can only use the camera you have with you.