



We are surrounded by visual media. Film, television, photography, social media, printed media. The list goes on. Photography is accessible to all and with most of us having a camera in our pocket at all times, capturing moments is easier than ever before.

That can be a brilliant thing. Whether you are taking photographs for yourself, to share on social media, or for a blog or website, there are a few simple steps that can help you to take better photographs and make the most out of that camera you have to hand.

EQUIPMENT

Do you have a smart phone? Yes? Then you're good to go.

The same principles apply no matter what camera you use. It matters little if you have a tripod, a smart camera app, a compact camera, a DSLR or any other kind of camera in - between. Of course it's great if you do, and these steps still apply, but you don't actually need anything more than your phone.

Anyone can take photographs and we all start somewhere, so forget the equipment list for now and just start.

SUBJECT

The best place to begin is with yourself (but no I don't mean selfies). The only place to begin, if you are serious about photography, is with yourself. Because photography is a record of what YOU see and how you see it.

So, think about what it is that you want to record. People? Landscapes? Products? Florals? What makes you tick...?

There really is no right or wrong here and it will be far easier to photograph something you find interesting than trying to begin with something you care less about.

LIGHT

First and foremost, good light is absolutely essential for taking decent photographs. So what is good light?

Well, good light comes in many forms and it really can depend on what type of photography you are interested in. My personal preference is to shoot in daylight but many photographers work with studio light, low light and night time shots.

As a general rule of thumb though, harsh light is not the best for photographs. For example, midday sun is a light that most photographers avoid as it creates harsh shadows and high contrast. Now if this is the look you are going for, perfect, use it. But if not, then think about taking photographs at other times of day.

The light first thing for the hour after sunrise and then for hour before sunset - the time they call golden hour - is the kindest by far though 'hour' can be extended to 'hour or two' if you ask me. If you are photographing portraits, at this time you can face your subject into the light without them pulling strange faces against the brightness. Maybe use the low sun to create a hazy light around your subject by framing it behind them.



Cloudy days are another great opportunity as the light is more even, there will be less contrast and colours will appear softer. For indoor shots, play with window light and your proximity to it. Closer will make your photographs brighter and more evenly lit, further away will create a moodiness and subtlety which can be oh so beautiful.

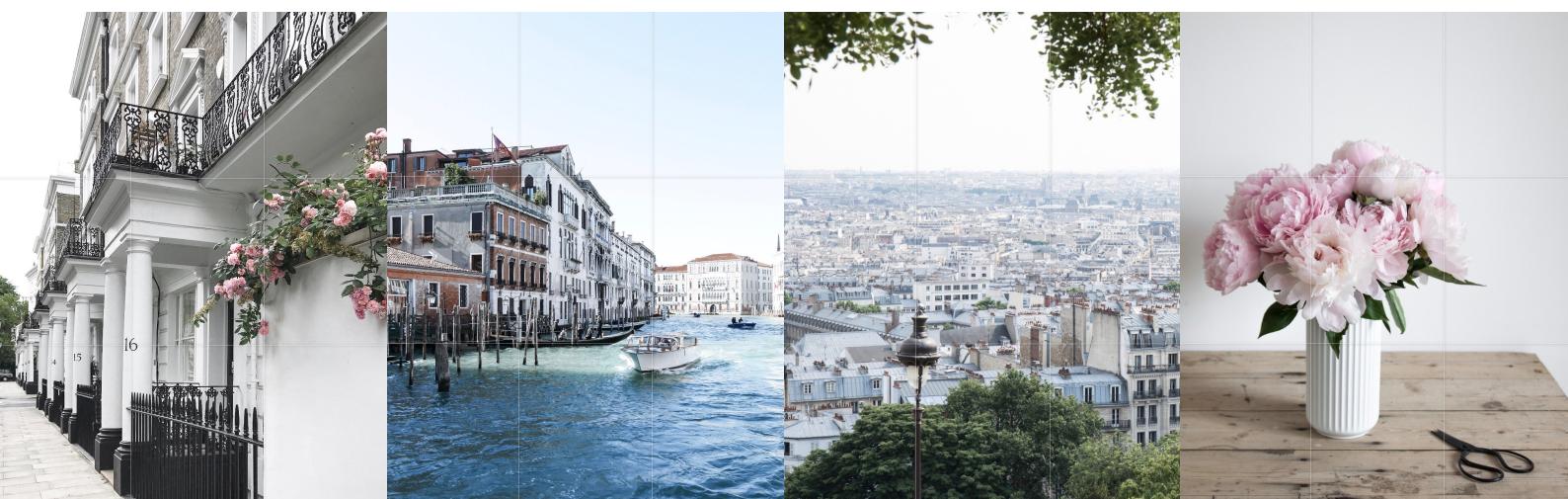
After considering the type of light, think also of the direction from which it enters the frame. Top? Side? Face on (backlight)? Or from behind you? Each will change the look of your photograph, again none is right or wrong, but all are fun to play about with!

FRAMING

First things first, try and hold your camera straight. It may sound silly but a straight line is so much more appealing than a skewed one, unless it is on a deliberate angle. But in general, a wonky horizon - for example - confuses the eye. A subject which the eye expects to see in a vertical position makes more sense the right way up.

There is no excuse for strange angles, especially when it is so easy to tweak in editing. If you have any form of social media for example, then you have access to basic editing, including a straightening tool.

The rule of thirds is another really handy way to check your framing. Most cameras and phones have a grid option on the screen, you can use it when taking your photographs to see how you have them lined up. The rule of thirds is really very straightforward, frame your subjects along the grid lines and put your focal points at the intersections of the lines.



For example on the photograph above of the London street with roses, the porches follow one vertical line and the wall to the right another. The roses sit mostly in the middle third to the right. The horizon in the Paris shot sits 2/3 up the frame and the lamp sits at the bottom left intersection. And so on.

Regardless of your subject, the principle is the same. Using the rule of thirds will help you frame any photograph in a way that is appealing to the viewer.

Framing photographs well is really just a matter of practice. The first shot you take may be the best, though more often than not it can take a few shots to get into the rhythm. Don't be afraid to move around, to crouch, to duck, to stand in a strange position.

I am not going to expand too much on the technical aspects of framing a photograph here as I'll look at it in depth in my extended eCourse.

EDITING

There are a huge number of editing apps available, not to mention editing software for computers. And really there is no right or wrong, no better or worse way to edit. If you have framed your photograph well and made sure it is in focus, then most of the work is already done before you even begin editing.

Instead look at editing as finding the right pair of shoes. You may try several ways before you find the one that suits you best. So play around with different styles until you find the one(s) you that suit you best. Then, by using a similar editing pattern, you will bring your photos together as a whole. They will make more sense if you are viewing them together and if you are sharing them online the viewer will come to know what to expect as your style. For now though, here are a few general rules to think about:

STRAIGHTEN

As mentioned above, pull those wonky lines straight and your photo will be instantly more appealing. (Unless, as also mentioned, you are deliberately photographing on an angle in which case, apply your rule of thirds!)

SHARPEN

Most photos need some sharpening, even those taken on a DSLR. Whether a little or a lot it is a step I always recommend!

BRIGHTEN

OK this one may be a little more subjective, but most photographs benefit from either turning up the exposure a little - especially if they are going to be viewed online - or at the very least turning up the whites and highlights.

Again I will cover editing in more depth in a specific e-book soon, and have a list of apps as recommended by you to include too. For now though, just have fun taking photographs!



FURTHER READING

My previous photography and Instagram related advice can be found at
www.humphreyandgrace.co.uk/category/photography-instagram/

I have more e-Books and e-Courses launching soon so be sure to check back to
<http://www.humphreyandgrace.co.uk/learn/>

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