Pointers for Shooters

Tips and tricks for taking better photos with your point and shoot camera

Julie Zahn Photography
Beaver Dam, WI

A Little About Me

- Started shooting in 1990 with a Nikon FE2 film camera and taught myself the basics of photography. BDHS Alumni (1992).
- UW-Madison Degree in Teaching
- Taught middle and high school science for 4 years in Washington DC and Verona, WI (Earth Science and Chemistry)
- Mentored with Stephanie Crown (wedding photographer) in Austin, TX from 2004-2005
- Moved back to Wisconsin and stayed at home to raise my 2 little girls (Lillian and Cecelia)
- Mentored with Patrick Manning (Manning Photography) in Milwaukee, WI from 2006 until 2007 when I started shooting weddings/portraits on my own.
- Currently, I am a stay-at-home Mom, photographer, and casket company owner ☺

First and Foremost:
Get To Know Your Camera

- Take the time to read through your manual and get to know the features your camera has to offer. You may be surprised to discover features you had no idea it had that might be very useful.
- Don't be afraid to experiment with features on your camera. Digital media is cheap and can easily be deleted.
- Most P&S cameras have presets for Portraits, Landscapes, Macro-photography, etc. Learn what these are for and use them when you can.
- In most cases, the camera will be right.

  Learn to trust it ☺.

Check your settings

- Before every use, make sure your settings are appropriate for what you are photographing.
- Resolution and quality – set to HIGH for images you might want to print or enlarge and MEDIUM or LOW for images you only intend to share online. If you have plenty of storage, it isn't a bad idea to shoot everything on HIGH quality.
- Presets – use them when appropriate (Portrait, Landscape, Macro, etc)
- Flash – Auto, On, or Off. In most cases, Auto is the best.

Batteries

- In general, rechargeable batteries (in most P&S cameras) are only good up to 2 years and should be replaced as soon as you notice a difference in how long they hold their charge.
- It is usually a good idea to stick with the same brand that built your camera. Off-brand batteries tend to be of lesser quality and won't last as long.

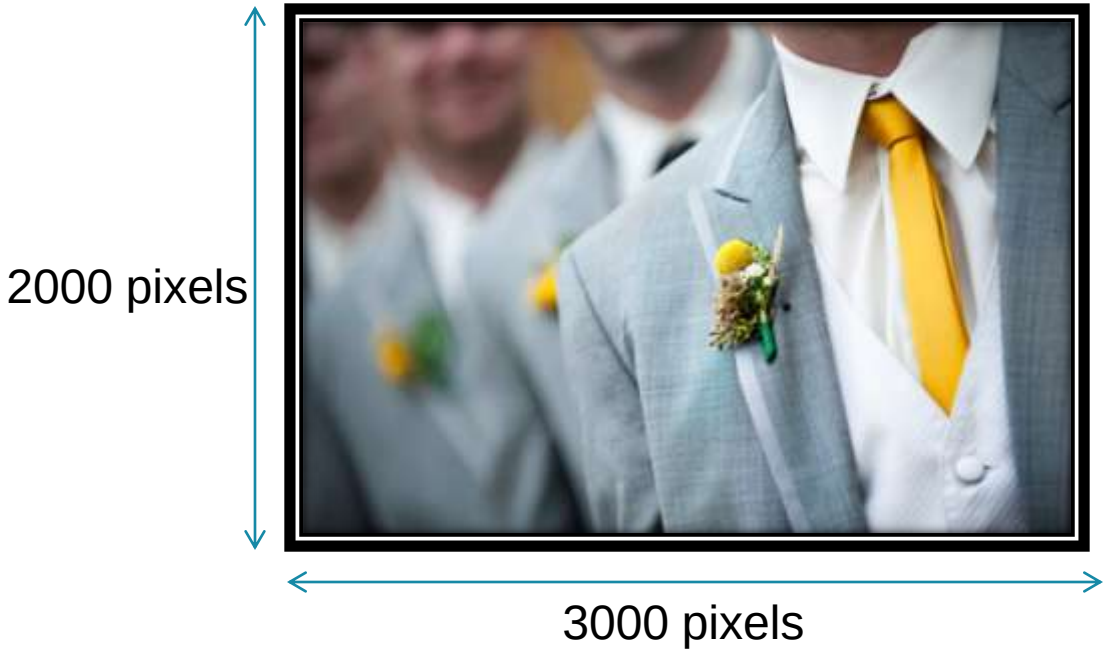
  Nikon camera = Nikon replacement batteries

Getting the most out of your memory cards

- Memory cards should not be used to store images long-term. They are designed as temporary storage devices only.
- Don’t delete in camera. Unless you are short on storage, download all images and delete them from your computer and not your camera. When you save and delete from a card over and over again without reformatting, you are asking for trouble.
- After downloading images from a memory card to a computer, be sure to REFORMAT the card to wipe it clean. This will significantly reduce your chances of corrupting the card which will render it unusable and prevent you from getting images off it.

Resolution Defined

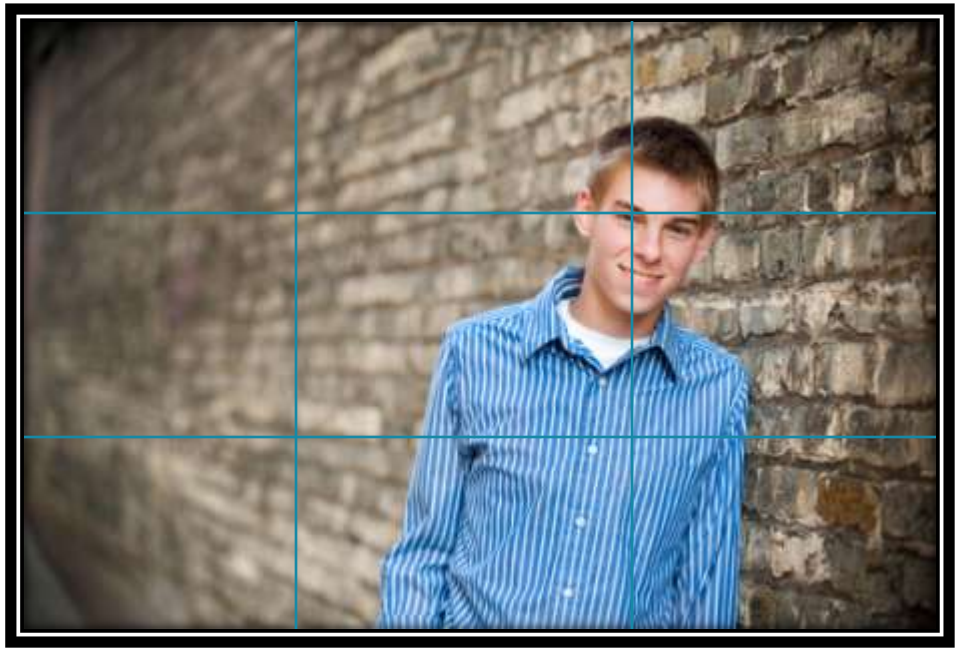
- Pixel Resolution = The total number of pixels in an image. The more pixels you have, the more image data there is to work with.
- An image that is 3000 pixels wide and 2000 pixels high has a total of 3000×2000 = 6,000,000 pixels or 6.0 Megapixels. One could refer to it as 3000 by 2000 or a 6-Megapixel image.
- A good resolution for providing quality prints up to an 8x10 size is 2000x1500 or 3 Megapixels. If you want to ensure quality in larger prints, stick with 6 Megapixels if your camera allows it.



Tips to improve your Composition

- Tip #1: The Rule of Thirds

  Position the most important elements in your scene along these lines, or at the points where they intersect. Doing so will add balance and interest to your photo.



Tip #2: Look for leading lines

- When we look at a photo our eye is naturally drawn along lines. By thinking about how you place lines in your composition, you can affect the way others view the image - pulling us into the picture, towards the subject, or on a journey "through" the scene. There are many different types of line - straight, diagonal, curvy, zigzag, radial etc - and each can be used to enhance a photo's composition.

Tip #3: Use symmetry or patterns

- We are surrounded by symmetry and patterns, both natural and man-made. They can make for very eye-catching compositions, particularly in situations where they are not expected. Another great way to use them is to break the symmetry or pattern in some way, introducing tension and a focal point to the scene.

Tip #4: Consider different viewpoints

- Before photographing your subject, take time to think about where you will shoot it from. Our viewpoint has a massive impact on the composition of our photo, and as a result it can greatly affect the message that the shot conveys. Rather than just shooting from eye level, consider photographing from high above, down at ground level, from the side, from the back, from a long way away, from very close up, and so on.

Tip #5: Frame your subject

- The world is full of objects which make perfect natural frames such as trees, archways, etc. By placing these around the edge of the composition you help to isolate the main subject from the outside world. The result is a more focused image which draws your eye naturally to the main point of interest.

Tip #6: Don't be afraid to break the rules

Presets

- Presets exist for good reasons. They allow people who know very little about photography to take great pictures. When using a preset, the camera will automatically be set to the optimal settings for that situation.
- **Portrait mode** will obviously used for portraits and will give you shallow depth of field to make the main subject stand out and it also helps making skin tones more natural looking.
- **Landscape mode** produces a greater saturation of blues and greens resulting in more vivid colors of landscapes. It also automatically focuses on the nearest subject allowing objects or people to become the main focus of a shot.
- **Sports mode** uses fast shutter speeds to freeze motion and focuses continually on moving objects.
- **Close-up (Macro) mode** is used for close up shots of subjects such as flowers and insects. The camera automatically focuses using the central focus area.

The Flash

- In general, avoid using the flash. Ambient light (natural light) is usually best.
- If you aren't sure, take a photo with the flash and without the flash so you have both.
- Most modern point and shoots are very good at detecting when you need a flash and have an Auto setting that will turn the flash on when light levels are too low for handheld images.

Situations when you'll need your flash

- Shooting subjects in direct sunlight. The high contrast between sunlit and shadowed areas can be very harsh. The camera will usually expose for the sunlit areas, making the shadows very dark. Use the flash to fill in these shadows (fill-flash).
- Shooting dark subjects against a bright background (sunset, bright window).

  Ex. People on a beach with a sunset behind them.
- When it is too dark to handhold your camera. Images will get grainy and/or blurry.
- When there is an odd color cast from the ambient lighting.

  Ex. In a room with very warm lamp lights.

Exposure Compensation

- In photography, "exposure" is the term used to evaluate whether or not the image is too bright or too dark. A correct exposure means the picture is pleasing to the eye, and the subject of the image is identifiable. With the practically unlimited amount of variation in lighting that exists both in nature and artificially, it is impossible for the camera to always get the exposure just right every time.
- Exposure compensation is an easy way to correct for improper exposure without manually changing all the camera controls (aperture, shutter speed, ISO). It allows you to tell the camera that you want a darker or brighter image and lets the camera make the adjustments for you.
- It is a "sliding scale" found on most digital cameras, usually indicated with a "plus/minus" sign and a sliding scale, usually ranging from -2.0 on the left to +2.0 on the right.
- When the subject is too bright and you want to make it darker, slide the exposure compensation to the negative numbers. An Exp. Comp. of -1.0 will make the image darker whereas an Exp. Comp. of +1.0 will make the image brighter.

Exposure Compensation Example

-1.0

0.0

+1.0

Printing

- When you need prints for an album, enlargements, as gifts, etc. use a professional lab. I recommend Mpix.com since they are for consumers and professionals.
- In general, one-hour photo labs (such as Walgreens, Walmart, etc) will not give you good quality prints with reliable color, depth, contrast, and longevity.

Storage Solutions

- After downloading from your memory card, I recommend only saving images you intend to use for something. Immediately erase poor photos (blurry, dark, subjects blinking, etc) so an not clutter up your image folders with them.
- Organize images by date and keyword so you can easily find them later. Using tags can be very helpful as well.

  2013-01-10-Presentation
- Regularly back up your images so you have 2 copies of everything important in case of drive failure.

  Passport portable drive

  Online backup sites such as Carbonite.