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The ownership problem of AI art

By Cody Aceveda

Who owns AI art? Is it the person who put in the prompt? What about the developer of the AI program? Does the artist whose work trained the AI program get any stake? What if the artist's art was used to train the AI program used without their permission?

These are just some of the questions that will shape the future of AI art. Right now, many of these questions remain unanswered or unasked, so we are essentially in the Wild West of AI image generation. That could change relatively soon though.

It's easy to miss if you're not paying attention to art spaces, but there is already a mini war going on between artists and the tech sector who're promoting the technological revolution of AI art.

The outcomes of this war will shape the future of AI art. Will we remain in this Wild West era a while longer or will AI image generators be forced to change their policies due to artists' concerns?

To understand this war and its potential outcomes, we need to take a closer look at the questions we've already posed and dive deeper into the issues with how AI art programs actually make their art. That's exactly what we're going to do in this article.

How is AI art made?

All artificial intelligence models work by being trained using existing information and developer fine tuning. In the context of text generation models, like Open AI's GPT-3, over one hundred billion parameters representing hundreds of billions of characters were used to train the AI model.

Images are obviously more complex than text, but the process is very similar. AI image generators are taught with millions of captioned images that are fed into a machine learning model.

Once trained, these models then can either create images from scratch after being given a prompt or they can take an image and convert that image into art. Open AI's DALL-E is an example of the former. The popular app Lansa AI is an example of the latter.

Both kinds of AI image models take from artists' work to create their images, which is why so many artists have problems with AI.

Links of Interest:

Viewbug - http://www.viewbug.com/
ePHOTOzine - http://www.ephotozine.com/
Federation of Camera Clubs [NSW] - http://www.photographynsw.org.au/
Australian Photographic Society - http://www.a-p-s.org.au/
Gurushots - https://gurushots.com/
Free Lessons with Serge Ramelli - http://photoserge.com/free-lessons/all

Viewfinder cover photo taken by.

Norm Blake

What are the problems with how AI art is made?

Now that we've discussed how AI art programs work, we can fully understand why so many artists have a problem with them.

Despite AI being a revolutionary new technology, the issues artists have with AI is one of the oldest problems in the art industry. That issue is plagiarism.

As we already discussed, AI image models are trained using existing images and their captions. Sometimes, these images are pulled from commercial databases, like Getty Images. However, it's more common that these images are simply taken from Google. The biggest AI programs use the same database of over 5 billion images collected from all over the internet created by the non-profit Laion-5B.

Because having an online presence is an essential part of being a modern artist, images from artists websites, instagrams, or other social media platforms are regularly included in the databases used to train AI image generation models. This is almost always done without the artist's knowledge or consent.

This isn't the first-time technology has plagiarized artists' work online recently. During the NFT boom of 1 -2 years ago, many artists had their work stolen and turned into NFT's. Thankfully for artists affected by this, they could easily recognize when their art was stolen. Unfortunately, it's not so simple when it comes to AI art.

Even if an AI image generator creates work strikingly similar to an artists' own work, artists can never be 100% sure of whether their art was used in an AI training database.

In some extreme contexts, AI art plagiarism is clear to see. For example, you can use an artist's name in your prompt to get art in the style of that artist. This art is made using that artist's work within the AI model's database.

In most circumstances though, the extent that AI art models plagiarize is a little complicated. At a bare minimum, AI art program developers are using copyrighted material without the author's consent to teach their AI models. On its face it's unclear whether this is a problem legally since it's not illegal to learn from or be inspired by copyrighted materials.

I could be inspired by the art of Vincent van Gogh and go on to have a lengthy and successful career producing work similar to van Gogh's. However, I wouldn't be able to repurpose van Gogh's work and pass it off as my own without giving the owners of his works' copyright some credit.

The difference between repurposing and being inspired by is human creativity. I could see a painting and be inspired to create something else. AI art generators can't be inspired. The only way they can create art is by repurposing art they've seen elsewhere.

This is the problem with AI art. Programs repurpose artists' work without consent and without giving the artists the proper recognition or compensation necessary. This is without a doubt plagiarism, and is something the AI art world still needs to reckon with.

What's next for AI art's copyright issues?

Artists themselves are sounding the alarm and trying to raise awareness about the issues of AI art, but they are unfortunately fighting an uphill battle against the tech giants behind this recent AI revolution.

Very few, if any, of the major AI companies have shown willingness to change their practices. These developers maintain that their programs are not guilty of plagiarism.

While we think it is plagiarism in the common sense of the word, the courts will be the ones who decide whether AI programs actually are legally liable for copyright infringement.

A collection of artists has brought a class action suit against Midjourney, Stable Diffusion, and DreamUp. These three companies are some of the biggest AI image generators on the market, so any action against them is sure to send waves throughout the entire AI industry.

These artists are also being joined by some corporate interest groups in their fight against big AI. Getty Images is suing Stable Diffusion because Stable Diffusion used Getty Images' database to train their AI model.

Both these cases represent a new frontier of intellectual property law. Instead of claiming that an individual artwork is infringing on the copyright of another artist's work, these artists are claiming the entire process of AI art generation infringes on their copyright.

We can't predict how judges might decide these cases considering that copyright law is notoriously complicated. We can be sure that the art world and the future of AI will be changed forever by whatever the judges decide, so this is a story we should all be paying attention to as it develops.

Helpful Tips & Tricks for Successfully Taking Photos in the Rain

by Christina Harman

When it comes to photography, the word "*rain*" can bring a sense of panic to even the most experienced photographer. While many photographers would advise waiting until the rain clears up or returning when the sun has decided to emerge again, in some cases, this isn't always possible.
Whether you're on a trip and seeing a site that you can't return to or photographing an event that can't be rescheduled, you will inevitably face some rain at some point during your photography adventures.
The good news is that you don't need to hide from the rain!
With a few preparations, you – and your camera – can be well prepared to face sudden showers.

The required amount of preparation depends much upon the niche you are focused on. If you're photographing a wedding or doing portraits, your preparation will need to be a bit more extensive. Not only will you have to keep your camera from drowning, but you will also have the task of keeping people dry and happy – and let's face it, people tend to get "*cloudy*" when it rains.
Don't be a fair-weather photographer! Here are some tips to get you started with photographing in the rain. Read on to see how you can become adept at mastering the art of rainy-day photography.

Packing Your Gear

Being prepared is half the battle! You should always be ready for those unexpected showers, especially if you are working in a climate prone to sudden rain showers. If it's calling for rain, you will want to make sure you bring along umbrellas and the right camera gear.

Here are a few things that you should pack before venturing out.

1. Umbrellas

Chances are, if you have them, you won't need them! But if you forget them, you'll wish you had them. Umbrellas can add some fun to your compositions while keeping your subjects dry and happy. Of course, you can also use an umbrella yourself – but you might want to think about bringing a friend along to hold it up for you!
While most of us don't have a supply of attractive umbrellas on hand, it's worth investing in a few decent ones if you plan to do rainy day photography. Brightly coloured umbrellas with fun patterns can add a touch of color to a dreary day. For weddings, you will probably want to stick with a neutral color, or black, so it doesn't take away from your subjects.

2.Bags

Even if the rain stops, the ground will still be wet. Bags can help keep your subjects dry if you want to photograph them sitting down and keep you dry if you're going to get down low for a unique perspective.

3.Camera Gear

No matter what you are shooting, keeping your camera dry is essential. Chances are you probably won't even mind getting wet, as long as your camera is nice and dry. There are a lot of camera raincoats for sale, but if you don't want to splurge on one of those or have to worry about lugging yet another coat with you, consider a plastic bag with a hole for the lens.

Using your camera hood is also a good way to protect the front of your lens from getting wet, as well as preventing pesky raindrops from photobombing your picture!

4.Tripod

If you have access to one, try to bring along a tripod. If you are shooting in low light conditions, you may need to use a slower shutter speed, which will require you to stabilize your camera. If a tripod isn't available, you could always use a flat, stable surface instead.

5.Moisture Absorbent Packets

If you plan to be out in the damp for an extended period of time, you may want to consider getting some moisture absorbent silica gel packets to throw in your camera bag before you head out. This will help to prevent condensation on your gear.

6.Towels

Don't forget to bring along a few hand towels – these can be lifesavers on a rainy day!

Tips for Shooting in the Rain

Ok, now let's take a look at some techniques for shooting in the rain and some things to avoid.

1.Finding a Location

Depending on the type of photo shoot, you may have the option of changing locations. Consider moving indoors, or keeping things under an awning, deck, trees, or other covering.

2.Make the Most of the Rain

Keep in mind that most of the rain isn't likely to show up in your pictures – you will see the effects of it – wet hair, droopy flowers, mud puddles, etc.

But if you're up for the adventure, consider incorporating the rain into your compositions. Raindrops are more visible if they are backlit, and falling raindrops are surprisingly photogenic. Raindrops on leaves, fruit, and other surfaces can add a beautiful dimension to your photography. Look out for puddles; they can present interesting opportunities for you to photograph reflections.

3.Watch the Light

One of the main things that you want to look out for is the lighting. Cloudy days present a great opportunity to look for natural lighting, and breaks in the storm can create beautiful lighting effects to incorporate into your compositions.

When using umbrellas or overhangs, watch out for shadows, have your subjects tilt the umbrellas slightly to adjust the lighting.

4.Adjust Your Aperture

While you will want to stick with a large depth of field (and a small aperture) if you are doing landscape shots, if you're taking portraits in dark, overcast weather, your shots may look dark and gloomy.

To let more light into your sensor, you may want to open up your aperture up to f/8, f/4, or even wider for clearer light.

After the Fact

Once you are done with your photoshoot, you most likely will want to pack up and head home. But don't forget your camera bag. If it was out and about with you, it's probably just as wet. Please don't make the mistake of putting your camera gear back in a damp backpack, be sure to let it dry out before packing everything back up!

Finally, Remember to Go with the Flow

While most of us dread the threat of rain, try to stay positive – despite the weather. Remember that great photos can be taken in the rain. Oftentimes, rain can add unique beauty to compositions. Taking pictures in the rain gives you the chance to break the routine and get some creative shots.

When taking portraits, be on the lookout for emotions. People tend to have strong reactions to rain, and capturing this in your pictures can create interesting images.

Who knows? You just might start looking forward to rainy days!

How to Update Your Camera's Firmware

By Tim Gilbreath

If you are a digital photographer, it is a good idea to make sure your camera's firmware is up to date to ensure you have a reliable device with the latest features and fixes. In this article, we will guide you step-by-step through updating your camera firmware.

What is Digital Camera Firmware?

The introduction of modern cameras near the end of the last century brought along another consideration for photographers to contend with, whether they be hobbyists or professionals: the requirement for updates to the digital technology that these new cameras would bring, and the maintenance of that technology.

Firmware is the software installed internally in your camera, whether it be a DSLR, mirrorless, point-and-shoot, or any other type of digital camera, that controls the hardware itself; it is essentially the "operating system" of the device. And just like the operating systems on your computer, they occasionally need to be updated to work properly.

Often, however, updates to digital cameras are not critical, and sometimes are just minor bug fixes and in-

terface improvements. Still, it is always recommended to keep your camera updated anyway.
Unlike other electronic devices that are connected to the Internet, digital cameras need a little more interaction from us to stay updated. Some electronic devices such as computers can be set up to perform software updates automatically “over-the-air”, often without us even knowing they’ve been applied until after the operation is complete.
Standalone cameras, on the other hand, generally require extra steps and a more manual process. In most cases, updating these devices involves manually downloading software, connecting your camera to a computer, and performing the update via a removable memory card.
Although different camera manufacturers have slightly different processes used to update their devices’ firmware, the general procedure is mostly the same across brands. Let’s go over the basic process first, and then delve into any brand-specific differences.

What You Will Need to Update Firmware

Here are the things you will need to have on hand before beginning the process of updating camera firmware.

1. Your digital camera (with a fully-charged battery)
2. A compatible memory card
3. A computer

A memory card reader (if your computer doesn’t have a card slot)

Step 1. Identify the Camera’s Current Firmware Version

Before you can begin updating your camera, you’ll need to find out if an update is even necessary. To do this, we need to compare the firmware version currently on your camera with the latest version available from the camera manufacturer.

To find this information, navigate to your camera’s settings and look for “firmware version” or something similar. Take note of the number indicated so you can compare it to the latest version available.

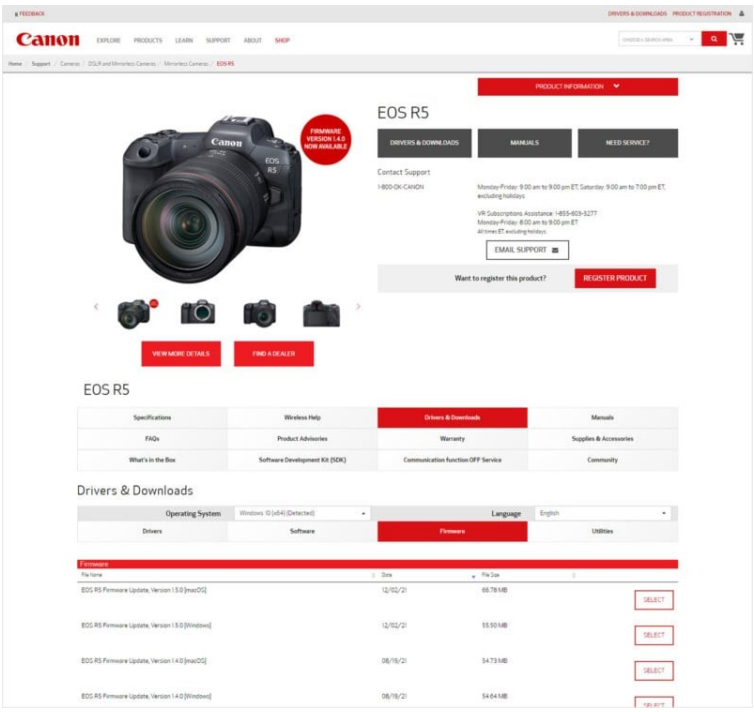
Step 2. Compare Your Firmware Version to the Latest Firmware

Each camera manufacturer has a support section on their website that provides information about the latest software updates available for each model of camera they produce. In addition to the actual software download, these sections also usually offer step-by-step instructions on how to apply the updates safely.
Canon's product information page for the R5 mirrorless camera with firmware update downloads.
If you determine that your camera does not have the latest update, you can proceed to the next step of downloading the update to your computer.

Step 3. Download the Firmware Update to Your Computer

After you've determined you need an update, the next step for most camera systems is to download the install file so that you can put it on your camera. The firmware support page for your camera will have a download link for this file, and it will usually be an .exe (if you're on a Windows/PC system) or .dmg (if you're on a Mac system).

Download the file to your computer, whether your default download directory or an easily accessible location such as your desktop. If you're on a Windows system, you'll likely need to extract the file's contents to move them in a later step.



Step 4. Charge Your Camera Battery

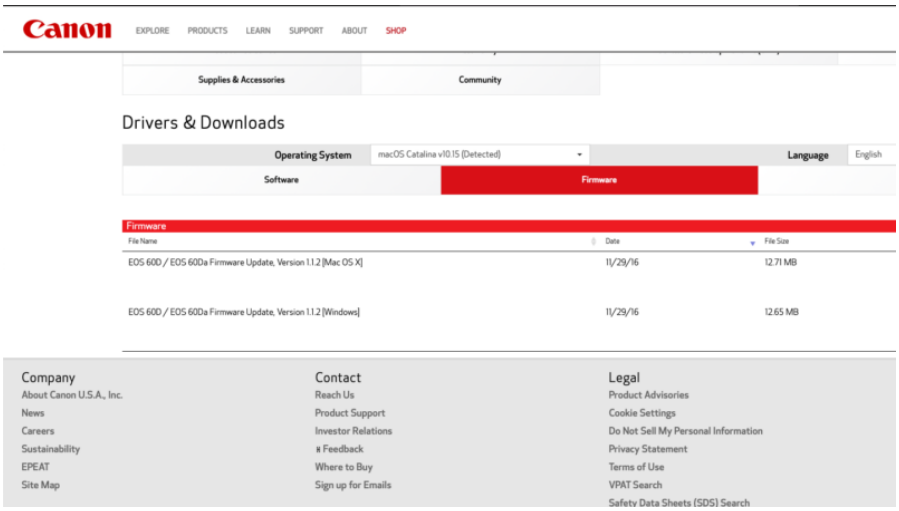
Before going into the update process, it is critical that your camera battery is fully charged. The update process can sometimes take quite a while, and if your battery dies before the update is complete, it could cause major issues with your camera and require a lot of work to get things back to the way they were.

Step 5. Format Your Memory Card

Before you can update your camera, you'll also want to prepare a memory card (whether SD, CF, XQD, or any other format) by formatting the card, or erasing its contents and preparing it for use on your camera system. You'll want to make sure it's a card that you don't mind having erased, of course. A small-capacity card used specifically for this purpose is ideal.

To format the memory card, insert it into your camera, and find the format option in your menu system. You'll see Format or something similar — if you cannot locate it, refer to your camera's instruction manual to find out how to do this. Select OK and give the camera a few minutes to complete the formatting.

Step 6. Transfer the Firmware to the Card



Next, we'll need to put the firmware update onto the memory card. Take the freshly formatted card from the camera and put it into the memory card reader on or attached to your computer. Once your computer detects the memory card as a storage device, move the firmware update file you downloaded in the last step over to the root (top-level) folder of the memory card by either dragging the file to your memory card or opening up the memory card as a directory and copying the file into the window.

After the file has been copied to the card, eject it from your computer and we are ready for the final step.

Step 7. Install the Firmware Update on Your Camera

Turn your camera back on, and insert the memory card. Go back into the menu again where you viewed the firmware version. After you access this, you should now see an option to Update or Install Update. Select this to get the install process started.

NOTE: It is important to remember to leave the camera alone while the update is completed. You'll likely see a message telling you to not turn the camera off during the process. Doing so can cause you fairly big headaches, so make sure to just let the camera do what it needs to do.

Once the update is completely finished, you'll see a message informing you that the process is complete. You'll need to turn the camera off and restart it, at which point the new firmware will have taken effect. You can return to the firmware settings in the setup menu to verify that your camera is on the latest version.

What if Something Goes Wrong?

Generally, updating the firmware on your camera is straightforward. If the camera is left alone during the actual install, you'll usually run into no issues. However, things can always happen, and if the camera turns off during the update, or won't function properly after the install and restart, don't panic. Consult your camera manufacturer's support page for instructions and advice on how to remedy the problem.

A quick search online might also provide you with insight from other users who have had the same issue. If worse comes to worst, you may need to contact the manufacturer and have your camera looked at by a repair technician.

A Special Note for Nikon Photographers

These instructions are generally applicable to most camera brands. Some cameras offer a little more assistance during the process, such as the ability to download a proprietary application that can connect directly to your camera to update the firmware. When you visit the support page for your camera (links are posted above), you can view specific instructions for that camera brand.

Nikon cameras, in particular, are a special case, due to the fact that some models offer several separate pieces of firmware. Depending on our camera model, when you visit the firmware update page, you may see installs for A, B, C, or L versions. You'll need to check all of these that are applicable to your model on both your camera and the support page to determine which pieces of firmware will need to be updated. The A, B, and C versions of firmware are operational and processing updates while the L version refers to updates specific to the camera lens.

The process for updating each piece of software is similar to the steps outlined above; you'll just need to repeat the process for each piece of firmware that needs to be updated.

Not all models offer multiple versions of firmware, and several models will require just one, similar to many other camera manufacturers.

Voila! Your Firmware is Now Up to Date

Updating your camera firmware is a fairly easy and uncomplicated process. It can provide vital functional improvements and address known bugs and issues, giving you a better camera that is more reliable and enjoyable to use

How To Use an ND Filter in 8 Easy Steps

By Julian Baird

In this article, I will share with you a robust and repeatable workflow that will ensure that each time you use an ND filter you'll get great results. The Neutral Density (ND) filter remains an essential piece of equipment for many photographers. Their use can extend exposure times to several minutes and can make focusing and exposure tricky, so having a solid workflow for their use is essential.

Are Filters a Thing of the Past?

For most landscape photographers the inclusion of filters in their kit bag is almost as important as a good tripod. Even with the dynamic range of modern sensors, there can still be the need to reach for a neutral density graduated filter to balance the exposure and prevent the highlights being clipped in the sky. The blending of multiple exposures in post processing has become very popular but many photographers still like to "get it right in camera", choosing to spend less time on the computer and more time in the field. However, the effects of using a ND filter or a polariser are either very difficult or impossible to replicate in post-production.

Effects like this are either very difficult or impossible to create without an ND filter.

What is a Neutral Density Filter?

The purpose of the ND filter is to reduce the amount of light entering the camera through its lens. The filter, normally square in shape, is a darkened piece of glass (or other material) that sits in a filter holder attached to the lens. Though there are circular ND filters that attach directly to the filter thread of the lens, these are typically used by videographers as the strength of the filter can be varied by rotating it, allowing greater control when aperture and shutter speed must be fixed.

ND filters come in a variety of strengths including 3 stops, 6 stops, 10 stops and even 15 stops. Each stop reduces the amount of light entering the camera by half, so exposure times can vary from a few seconds to a few minutes. Used correctly, and for the right reasons ND filters can smooth out water, give rivers and waterfalls an ethereal look, make clouds streak across skies and even make moving objects like people disappear. The ND filter isn't just for landscape photographers and it can be used in any genre of photography where long exposures are needed such as cityscapes.

No matter what type or strength of ND filter you use, the steps laid out in this article will help you use them successfully.

Selecting the right strength of ND filter is important. If I'd selected a very strong ND filter for this image, I would have lost all the texture in the water.

8 Steps to Success

The use of ND filters can extend exposure times to anything from a few seconds to 10 minutes (or more), and with the lack of light entering the camera, it can be difficult or impossible to focus or compose when the filter is in place. No one wants to waste several minutes on an exposure only to spot a problem later when you look at the image on the back of the camera. The light can change very fast, so by following this workflow, you can make sure that when the shutter opens and your long exposure starts you have a good chance that your image will turn out well!

1. Keep it Clean

This should go without saying, but before you head out with your ND filter, check it, and any other filter you are planning on using, is free of dirt, grit, fingerprints, sea spray or just dust. Depending on where you are going, the last thing you want to be doing is trying to clean your filters on location. Each manufacturer will have their own cleaning recommendations but a micro-fibre cloth and some anti-static cleaning fluid normally does the trick. If it's just a bit of dust try a blower. Remember to take your cleaning equipment with you in case you need a mid-shoot clean. The blower is actually rather handy for blowing little droplets of water of your filters so it's worth taking as well.

2. Set Your Composition

While it may be possible on some cameras or on really bright days to still be able to compose an image with a strong ND filter attached, I would recommend getting your composition sorted before attaching the ND filter. If the ND filter is attached and each shot takes 2 minutes, you're going to spend a lot of time each time you fine-tune your composition. Get everything placed in the frame the way you want it and then make sure it's locked in using a sturdy tripod.

3. Take a Base Image

My base image. No filters at this stage.

Without any filters attached take an image and then check it for sharpness and exposure. Is the image acceptably sharp in the areas you need it be? Is the image well exposed? Could you expose more to the right, or have you got blown highlights? The idea of the base image is to make sure the fundamentals of the image are correct before adding filters.

Though not essential, I would recommend starting out taking your base image in manual exposure mode. You will need to do this later anyway, as adding a strong ND filter will likely prevent the automatic exposure mode on some cameras working correctly.

If you aren't comfortable in manual exposure mode at this stage, don't panic, just use aperture priority for now and let the camera work out the exposure for your base image.

4. Add Other Filters

Adding an ND graduated filter to help control the exposure of the sky.

Once your base image is sorted you may choose to add a polariser or ND graduated filter. Perhaps you found that the highlights in the sky are being blown out? Now is the time to add your ND graduated filter.

Take your image again and do all the same exposure and sharpness checks. If you added a polariser at this stage you will need to check your exposure again as polarisers tend to also reduce the amount of light entering the camera.

Remember to leave the slot in the filter holder that is closest to the lens free for your ND filter. ND filters should always be placed closest to the lens.

5. Prepare the Camera for a Long Exposure

Time to go to manual mode! Take note of your aperture and shutter speeds from your last image, set your camera to manual exposure mode, and input the same values. You will change the shutter speed in the next step, but it's handy to dial in your base image values now.

Cover the viewfinder to prevent unwanted light leaking into the camera.

You will also need to set the focusing mode to manual as well. With the stronger ND filters in place, the metering systems aren't the only automated system on the camera that could struggle. If you are already using Back Button Focusing (BBF) you don't need to switch to manual focus as the camera's autofocus is already decoupled from the shutter release.

One last thing, it's good practice to cover the viewfinder of your camera during long exposures. I typically only do this if the exposure time is more than a minute or if the sun is directly behind me but getting into the habit of doing it will do you no harm. Some cameras have a built-in switch to do this, others you have to slot a cover in, but if your camera has none of these either cover it with your hand, tape, or a bit of cloth.

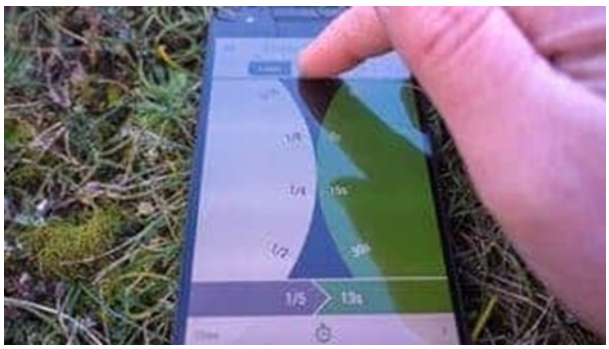
6. Select your ND Filter

Your selection of ND filter is really a creative choice. Pick carefully though as stronger isn't always better. Rivers and waterfalls typically only need a ½ to 1 second exposure time, whereas cloud movement may need 30 seconds to a couple of minutes.

Selecting which ND filter to use comes with experience so you may need to experiment a little. Remember though, use the ND filter with purpose as it won't make a bad image a good image, but used in the right circumstances it can really change the way a photographed is viewed.

7. Calculate the New Shutter Speed

Using an app can help you calculate exposure time.



With your choice of ND filter in place, the amount of light entering the camera has reduced so you will need to set a new shutter speed. You can do the math in your head by doubling the exposure time for each stop of the ND you've selected, but anything past 3 stops and I'm reaching for an app! I personally use the Lee Filters app as it already has options for 6, 10 and 15 stop ND filters, and it has a handy little countdown timer built in.

Generally speaking, if your base exposure was correct, the calculated value should give you a similar exposure in the final image. However, a lot of this will depend on your actual filter. For example, some 10 stop filters might be closer to 9.5 or 10.5 stops, but with experience of your own kit, you should be able to make your own minor adjustments.

Where things may not be so straightforward is when your exposure time is measured in minutes and the sun is either rising or setting. At these times of days, the amount of light can vary a lot over the space of a minute. There really aren't any hard and fast rules here. You will learn from experience to either shorten or lengthen calculated values.

If you're just starting out though, the calculated value from an app will get you great results most of the time!

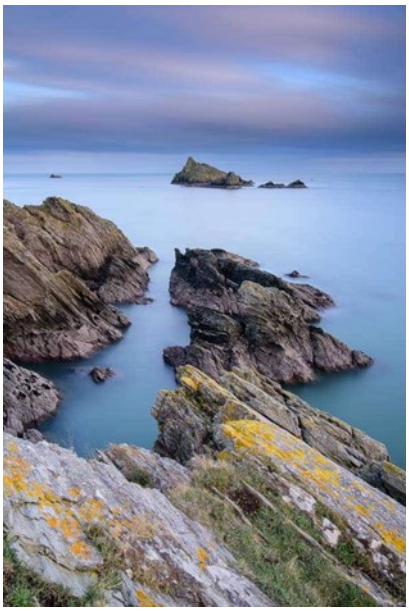
8. Take the Photo!

Remember to check your exposure and focus after each shutter release.

Yes, finally you get to release the shutter. Either use a short timer to trigger the shutter, or use my preference of a remote release and mirror lock up. If you are using a 3 stop, or maybe a 6 stop ND you typically won't have to wait too long for your image. You may have to wait a bit longer for a 10-stop image and probably sit down and read another IP blog article for a 15-stop image though.

Once the exposure has finished check it all again on the back of the screen. If you followed the previous steps your image should be sharp, well exposed and look great!

And Finally



So, there you have it, 8 easy steps to how to use an ND filter. OK at first that may seem a lot of work but I strongly suggest you stick with it. By preparing your camera, settings and composition before adding an ND filter you reduce the likelihood that your last two-minute exposure will need to be repeated because you didn't check something.
Like any good camera technique though, the more you practice with it, the quicker it will become 2nd nature to you.
When you get home to process your images you may notice that some ND filters, particularly the stronger 10 and 15 stop variety will add a colour cast to the image. Don't worry as this can easily be corrected in post-processing if shot your images in raw. Alternatively, the colour cast can be used creatively to set a certain mood for your picture. It's up to you.
The final image. By following the steps I've ensured my image is well exposed, sharp and required minimal processing.
Remember to clean your filters when you get back from a shoot. I almost guarantee at some point you will forget to do step 1 and head out without cleaning them first. I've done it myself so I've got into the habit of cleaning when I get home as well.

How Much Camera Do You Really Need?

by Douglas Turney

Are you looking to buy a new camera this year? Perhaps you are hoping that the holiday season will bring you a fantastic new camera as a gift. I bet you already know which camera you would like to have next. But what is wrong with your current camera?

I'm no different than almost any other photographer; I like new gear. There, I admitted it, and I'm sure you can too. Go ahead, and I'll wait. Now, don't you feel better that you accepted it? New gear, especially a new camera body, gets me excited, and it even motivates me to get out and shoot more often. That's a good thing. Yet how much of that new camera's capabilities are you going to use?

The other day, I was sitting with my camera waiting for some photos to download to the computer, when I started scrolling through the various menus. As I scrolled, I kept thinking to myself that I never used this setting or that setting. I began to realize that I didn't even know what some of the features do or how I would use those settings. Don't get me wrong; I believe that I understand my camera well, and I do customize numerous settings to get the camera to perform the way I want it to perform and need it to perform.

Yet, if I had to guess, I use less than 20% of the various settings and capabilities of the camera.

Sure, I have customized the camera to use back-button focus, which I love. I have my dual card slots set to record raw to one card and JPEG to the other. I've changed my low burst rate to more of a medium burst rate of 5 frames per second. I've even adjusted my dial wheel's shutter speed and aperture settings to scroll differently than the manufacturer's settings. However, when I scrolled through those menus and their sub-menus on my camera, I started to realize that I don't use and have never used a considerable portion of them. Of course, some of the features are not needed for my type of photography, and I'm sure some of the features I use aren't required by other photographers. The camera manufacturers know this, but it is better for them to load the camera with many different features to appeal to as many customers as possible.

I believe when most people are considering a new camera body, their desire for the new camera body focuses mainly on five features: sensor size, ISO range, megapixels, burst frame rate, and today, mirrorless or not. Sure, there are other considerations like camera body size that come into play. But who is looking at all those other features when purchasing the camera?
So, what's wrong with having all those features even if I don't use them? They're there in case someday I do, right? Well, I can agree with that until the time I'm trying to find that setting I want to change, and I have to traverse my way through all those menus and options. First, I need to remember where that setting is changed in the menu and how to get there. Second, it takes time to scroll and click through the menu. I want to be in the settings that I want to change as fast as I can. And most of the upper-end cameras still don't have touchscreen features. We are still hampered with dials and buttons to make changes.
Here are a couple of features that I have never used:

- Auto white balance adjustment
- The entire retouch menu
- Multiple exposures

Limit AF-area selection mode
What features do you never use, and what features are ones that you can't live without for your photography?

8 Tips for Safety and Etiquette When Photographing at Night

By Jill Waterman

In recent years, several incidents involving careless shutterbugs light painting with burning steel wool gained notoriety in the press, giving legitimate night photographers a bad reputation. With these unfortunate matters in mind, we interviewed a variety of night-photography specialists to compile the following eight tips on safety and etiquette when photographing in the darkness.

1. Do no harm and don’t be a jerk

Taking a cue from the Hippocratic Oath, Stu Jenks invokes “Do No Harm” as his first rule of night-photography etiquette. “Go in, get the shot you want, and then leave the land or the cityscape as you found it,” he says.
Rule 1a: “Don't Be a Jerk. Some people just have to get ‘The Shot’ at any cost,” he says. “Your photos are not as important as you think—nor are you.” Instead, Jenks advises, “Be respectful. Be quiet. Be kind. Be generous. Be nice. Not only will you feel better, but your photographs will look better.”

For the image *Catawba Falls Hoop Dance*, Jenks swung battery-powered LED lights over a stream, a highly portable and non-destructive light painting so-

lution.Stu Jenks

2. Approved access is safer than trespass

Scott Martin agrees, saying, “Photographers can be pretty forward, in your face and can feel entitled to the right to make images.” Instead, he counsels, “Get over yourself and do the opposite. Speak softly and show your honest enthusiasm for your work. Ask permission, knowing and accepting that the property owner may very well reject you. Never get pissy and never challenge the authorities. These are real people doing their jobs. Show them that you're a real person doing your job, too.”

While shooting long exposures on a remote dirt road of unknown ownership, Martin was approached by a young Sheriff’s Deputy with serious intent. “Once he realized I wasn’t scared or trying to run, he quickly went from adversarial to asking for photography advice,” Martin says.Scott Martin

Troy Paiva has developed somewhat of an expertise in gaining access to private sites for night-photography shoots. “When scouting a secure location, it can be a matter of simply asking the owner, caretaker or property manager for permission, he explains. “Saying that you’re ‘taking pictures at night’ will usually just confuse them, but showing them some work stored on your phone is a great ice breaker. Thumb through your sample images while explaining about time-exposures, star trails, cloud movement, and light painting. More often than not, after seeing the work, they will give you the run of the place.”

For several years, Paiva offered light-painting workshops at the Pearsonville Junkyard, with the owner’s permission. In this image, a student’s green laser pointer was aimed at a white car, while Paiva painted other parts of the car with red-gelled lights. He framed the shot with a distant streetlight shining through the car windows, diffused by the dirty glass.Troy Paiva

Gabriel Biderman adds, “You'd be surprised by the doors you can open with a little respect and appreciation of someone else's property.” After spying Pollepel Island and the ruins of Bannerman Castle during a train ride up the Hudson River, Biderman did an online search to discover the Bannerman Trust. He notes, “I reached out about offering overnight photography workshops on the island with all proceeds going back to the trust for restoration of the structures.” This has become one of the Trust’s top fundraisers. “During our workshop years, the castle has been stabilized and the mansion has gotten a 2nd floor and a roof,” he says. “It’s been an amazing experience to photograph a historic place, and to give back, as well as to introduce many people to a very unique New York experience.”

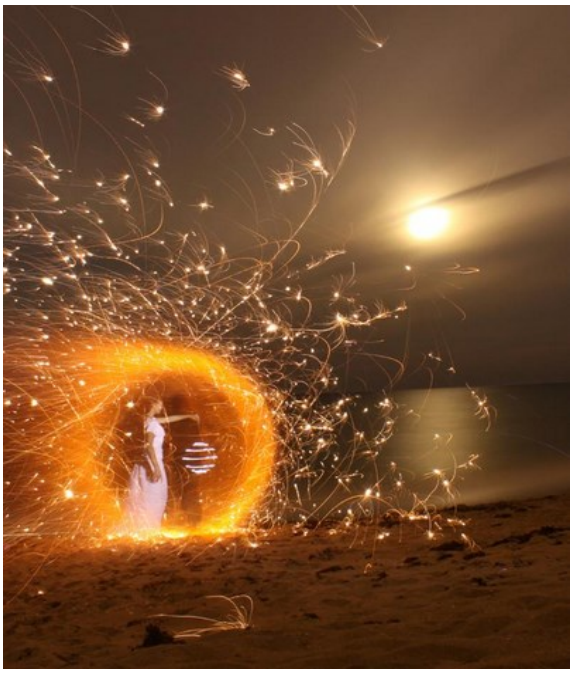
Star trails follow the shape of the towers in this 12-minute exposure of Bannerman Castle. “Most people were upset to see support beams go up to stabilize the castle,” says Biderman. “I took it as a challenge to reinterpret a building I’ve shot many times while working with the Bannerman Trust.”Gabriel Biderman

3. Be aware of the ramifications and hazards of your gear

Night photography is a very process-oriented endeavor, involving all manner of materials to achieve a desired effect—from trinkets to munitions. With items such as laser pointers, sparklers, and flaming steel wool, it’s es-

sential to realize that the actions you take can have unexpected consequences, and possibly even lasting impact to other parties, or to your setting. “I've made my mistakes in the past,” says Jenks. “I’ve learned and grown from those mistakes. I’ve also changed lighting instruments over the years to be less dangerous. And of late, I've gone lighter, making it easier to hike into the wilds or around cities.”

Known for his flame spiral images in a desert landscape, such as *Catalina State Park, Arizona #2*, Jenks has learned from experience to exercise caution and plan in advance for safety measures when doing this type of work.Stu Jenks
When working with flammable materials, Jason D. Page stresses common sense as his most essential advice. “Take a good look around where you plan to shoot,” he explains. “If you’re surrounded by concrete, sand, or water, you are probably good to go; however, if you’re near a wooden building or a dry forest, you might want to think again.”



Page used multiple fireworks for this visionary image of a Lunar goddess, in addition to custom LED lights, light painting brushes, and a Coast HP7 flashlight. His location on the water’s edge, surrounded by sand and sea, kept safety issues to a minimum.

If you do decide to combine light painting and burning materials in your image making, Page recommends precautions to protect both yourself and your surroundings. “I like to prepare for the worst case scenario,” he notes. “Eye protection and gloves are a must. Additionally, a fire extinguisher is always good to have on hand, and a wet towel can put out a small flame even quicker.”

4. Be prepared for inclement weather and adverse conditions

Biderman particularly enjoys working in inclement weather. “Rain offers so many wonderful reflections, and snow can be either flash-frozen or turned into confetti—both of which are enhanced by the longer exposures of night,” he says. But in these conditions, it’s essential to keep your gear safe and dry. A basic umbrella is one form of protection; however, “if the weather is going sideways you’ll definitely want to add a rain cover and a lens hood,” he says.

When exiting the subway one winter night, Biderman encountered this chance snowstorm. “I took out my camera, turned myself into a tripod by leaning against a wall, and fired off consecutive shots from 1/4 to 1/15 of a second,” he explains. He also recommends experimenting with weather from under the shelter of an awning or through rain-splattered windows.
In his South Florida home base, Page often encounters heavy downpours and intense lightning storms. “It’s always a good idea to check the weather before heading out,” he says. “I carry a few large garbage bags to use for a quick shelter to keep me and my gear dry; but there’s no hiding from lighting.”
Says Biderman, “Lightning and storm chasing is another game entirely, and you really need to consider your safety, understanding, and training before venturing off on this type of adventure."

Any storm that produces thunder and lightning should be carefully evaluated by photographers seeking to photograph its effects. As a general safety measure, stay at least 6 to 10 miles from the activity. If you can hear thunder and are outside and unprotected, you are close enough to be struck by lightning.

5. Keep what you carry to a minimum

The experimental nature of night photography makes it tempting to cart along everything but the kitchen sink. But for the well-being and safety of both your body and your gear, resist that temptation and pack your kit to be lightweight and efficient.

"One of the best ways to keep your gear safe when photographing at night, especially in less than desirable areas, is to keep it to a minimum," says Tim Cooper. "One camera, one lens, a cable release, and a tripod—if you need more than that, keep it in your backpack or camera bag and wear it at all times. Never put your gear on the ground and walk away."

Automobile headlights and tail lights dissolve into pulsing red and white streams in Cooper's rooftop

view, made during a private tour of the Post Office building, in Washington,

6. Don't skimp on essential accessories and clothing

While it's important to be selective in what you carry, one area one shouldn't skimp is with memory cards and batteries—the essentials to keeping your gear running smoothly. Todd Vorenkamp recommends bringing extra batteries for both cameras and flashlights. "If your camera runs out of batteries, your photographic adventure is cut short and you head home bummed out," he says. "If your flashlight runs out in the middle of a moonless or overcast night, you could be in a very tight spot, with no way of illuminating your path, or the hazards between you and your home."

Vorenkamp also advises charging your cell phone battery fully before you leave home, noting, "Modern phones can double as flashlights in a pinch. They're also your best way of getting help from others." For maximum security, pack a portable battery bank for your phone, as well.

For his Master's thesis, Vorenkamp photographed in and around the dark and desolate landscape of an abandoned industrial site. While working, he always carried two flashlights and wore a headlamp, which kept him oriented in the darkness and freed his hands to carry his tripod and camera gear.

Jenks always carries at least three camera batteries and two flashlights when shooting at night. Another essential aspect of his wardrobe is hiking boots, ideally with ankle support.

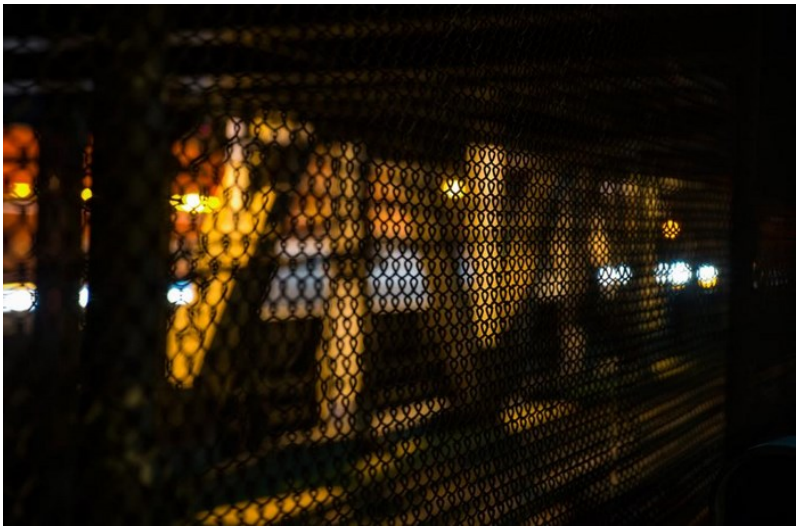
Page generally works in remote areas, where animals pose one of the biggest safety threats. To protect himself from sudden close encounters, he carries bear spray and wears snake boots or guards. Topping his list of most dangerous (and certainly most annoying) animals are mosquitos. "When shooting in South Florida, bug spray is a must," Page explains. "To be extra safe in the summer, I wear a full bug suit, covering me from head to toe. Without it, shooting in swampy areas would not be tolerable."

A Speedlight 580ex ii freezes the dragonflies into this light painted image in Jupiter, Florida's, Jonathan Dickinson State Park. Page painted color into the scene with his custom Light Painting Brushes and used LED lights for the small white specs. Like all of his light painting work, this is a single photographic exposure, with no Photoshop or post-production work.

7. File a float plan

Once darkness sets in, the world takes on a much different appearance, and one can feel swallowed up by the night. Figuratively speaking, this can be a thrilling experience, but it's something to avoid at all costs. For your own safety, and the peace of mind of your loved ones, Todd Vorenkamp recommends following the United States Coast Guard guidelines to "file a float plan" before venturing out on a night shoot.

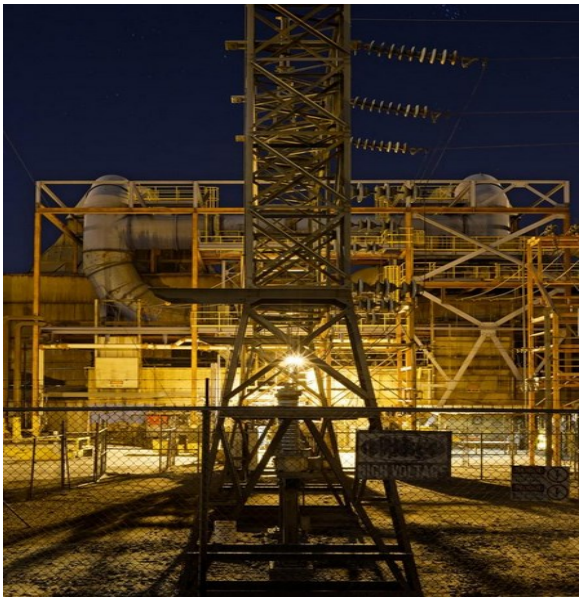
"Tell a friend or family member (someone NOT accompanying you) where you are going, how long you plan to be there, and when you think you'll get back. "Those three items are the bare minimum," he says. Additional details to consider sharing include what you are wearing, your routes to and from the location, alternative forms of contact (cell phone, email, radio, etc.), or anything else you feel is pertinent. If you do not return at the appointed time, your designated contact should start taking steps to report you missing. Vorenkamp advises, "If your plans change, make sure to update your contact with your location and estimated time of return, then check in once you get home, to let them know you are safe."



This chain link fence is the only separation between a public access pathway and the subway tracks running across the Manhattan Bridge. While locations such as this are ripe with photo opportunities at night, it's essential to use common sense when shooting, and to always file a "float plan" with a dedicated contact.

8. Boost your awareness and quiet your mind

As Tim Cooper says, "Photographing at night is inherently dangerous, even in the safest of conditions. It's easy to trip, fall, bump into things, tear your clothing, and even knock over your camera. I know—I've done all of these things." His best advice is to be ultra-aware. "It's easy to get excited about the shot and just jump right in. Instead, take a moment. Take stock of your surroundings. Map out the area you'll be walking in and make yourself aware of any possible dangers before you begin shooting."



When shooting at night, the first order of business is to take stock of your surroundings and be attentive to telling details, such as the High Voltage signs that surround this industrial plant.

Along with being attentive to his surroundings, Jenks finds it essential to quiet his mind while unloading his truck for a night shoot. "I say a little prayer. I take a deep breath. I close my eyes and meditate for a couple of seconds," he explains. "I think. I plan. I throw away that plan and do something else. I take a better photo than the one I first had in mind. By quieting my mind, I open my eyes."

As a bookend for the encounter, Jenks offers one last piece of etiquette for the end of the night. "As you load up and prepare to leave, turn back to where you've worked and thank the land. Say, 'Thank You' out loud," he suggests. "Show a bit of gratitude to the land that provided your images and this experience. For me, it puts food on my table, but it also puts joy in my heart."

Tips for Taking Better Pictures from a Moving Vehicle

By: Hannele Luhtasela-el Showk

Have you ever been stuck in a car or a bus and seen all this great photographic potential passing you by? Fantastic landscapes, funny signs, unusual animals, and stunning compositions seem to always appear when I'm stuck in the passenger seat of a car. It's frustrating, especially if the car can't stop to let you capture the view.

A fantastically colourful landscape by the highway in the Atlas mountains of Morocco.

The Challenge

For someone who actually doesn't like the idea of just driving through an area and taking photos of it through the window (maybe because it feels so impersonal), I've done a surprising amount of it. Often because it's a now-or-never situation; the view won't be there later, or I won't be returning in the near future. Sometimes I'm on a highway and can't stop, or there are so many photos I'd like to take that I feel bad asking the driver to stop over and over again. Also, taking photos from a car or bus can be great for people who have a hard time walking.

I couldn't resist this view seen through a bus window in Iceland.

In a car, bus, or train, there are many contexts in which it's inappropriate, difficult or impossible to take a photo. Fortunately, there are also many situations in which you don't have to leave completely empty-handed. It is possible to take photos from a moving vehicle, but it takes a bit of knowledge and planning.

It's a suboptimal situation but sometimes you just have to find a way to make the best of it. Most likely it's better than not trying at all! In this article, I hope to give some tips to help make your trips more enjoyable and creative. Let's begin!

The amazing houses and views in the mountains of northern Morocco were difficult to resist, even though it was a bit tricky to compose well.

When to try and when not to shoot

Safety is paramount

Even though trying is almost always better than not, there definitely are situations where you shouldn't be taking photos from a moving vehicle. Remember that you're sitting in a metal box moving through space at high speeds!

It goes without saying that you shouldn't be doing any photography if you're the driver. But as a passen-

ger, you also need to be aware of how your photography may pose a danger to you or others. In short: think about safety. Make sure you don't block the driver's line of sight or disturb them in some other way. Communicate with the driver and the other passengers. If you're on a tour bus, don't block other the passengers' view through the window.

A very old photo I took through a car window. There are clearly some issues in terms of sharpness and composition, but it's still a lovely memory.

If you're in a car and planning to open a window, make sure nothing can fly out and be aware that there might be branches or objects by the side of the road that can hit you or your camera. Also be aware of oncoming traffic, and don't lean out! Only slow down if it won't disrupt the flow of traffic and if you convince the driver to stop the car for a photo break, make sure it's in a safe place.

Is it worth it?

Even if everything's okay in terms of safety, there are a few other things to consider before you start photographing.

Can the car stop for a little while instead of you attempting to take pictures through the window? If not, can the window be opened? Is there enough light for photography? Will doing so mean that you'll miss out on seeing and enjoying the view?

There may also be places where I wouldn't recommend photographing through a window. Driving through a city or village pointing a telephoto lens at people could be considered a bit creepy.

This is how you do it

Enough of the don'ts and the warnings. It's time to learn how to take great photos in this challenging situation.

Expose right

Not surprisingly, the most challenging part of this kind of photography is dealing with movement. In a moving car, your subject matter might swoop by at very high speeds. In practical terms, this means using a shutter speed that can freeze that movement, finding an aperture that allows for enough depth of field, and choosing the ISO that makes all of that possible.

Here, the car was moving quite slowly so I got quite a sharp photo with a relatively wide angle. The dark and rainy weather made exposure a bit challenging, but it also made the sky much more dramatic.

The desired exposure depends a lot on what kind of a photograph you want. To get a sharp landscape photo from a moving vehicle, it's important to have a fast enough shutter speed.

How fast depends on how fast you're moving, but faster is generally better. I would suggest using at least 1/400th, but preferably faster. Be aware that the foreground is more likely to reveal signs of movement, whereas photographing something that's further from the road is more likely to be successful.

A photo with a lot of depth, taken from a moving car.

If we continue with the example of a landscape photo, it's also important to have a large enough depth of field to get a sharp capture of the whole view. This means you'll need to use a small aperture, preferably

around f/8.0, also depending on the sweet spot of your lens.
If you have the chance, try different settings, but if you can only take one or two photos, aim for a small aperture. Again, this depends a lot on what kind of photograph you're aiming for and light levels.

I was aiming for a sharp photo of these beautiful geological features rushing past the car in the Moroccan Atlas Mountains.
The last element of exposure, ISO, doesn't make as much of a difference to this kind of photography as shutter speed and aperture do. ISO has the effect it always has, so the lower it is, the better.
Still, with modern DSLRs, using a higher ISO might

be the key to allowing you to use the shutter speed and aperture you need while not adding a lot of noise.

It was cloudy and rainy, but by aiming for silhouettes and a dark atmosphere, this industrial view turned out sharp enough.

Plan well

It might seem difficult to plan in these situations, but there are usually some things that can help you create as good a photograph as possible. Even before you take your photo you can observe the light levels outside, which can help you with exposure.
You may also be able to get a good composition by observing the landscape outside and imagine what it might look like behind that curve or beyond that next hill.
You can also see when there will be power lines appearing in your photo. I find that one of the most annoying parts of this kind of photography is power lines. They always get in the way!
Also, remember that this is one of those situations where taking a lot of photos is not a bad thing.
Really annoying power lines! Still, I decided that I wanted to document the aftermath of a pretty bad storm outside Rabat, Morocco.

Optimise

To get as good a photo as possible, you should open the window to avoid unfortunate reflections or dirt in your photo. A closed window will also limit your movement and your options when it comes to composing.
There are many situations in which opening the window isn't really a great idea, though. Remember that the most important thing is safety. If you can't open the window, use the viewfinder and possibly a polarizing filter to try to avoid getting reflections and dirt in your photo.

Conclusion

Have you taken photos out of a car, bus, or train? I find the hardest part to be composing the photo.

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