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Viewfinder.

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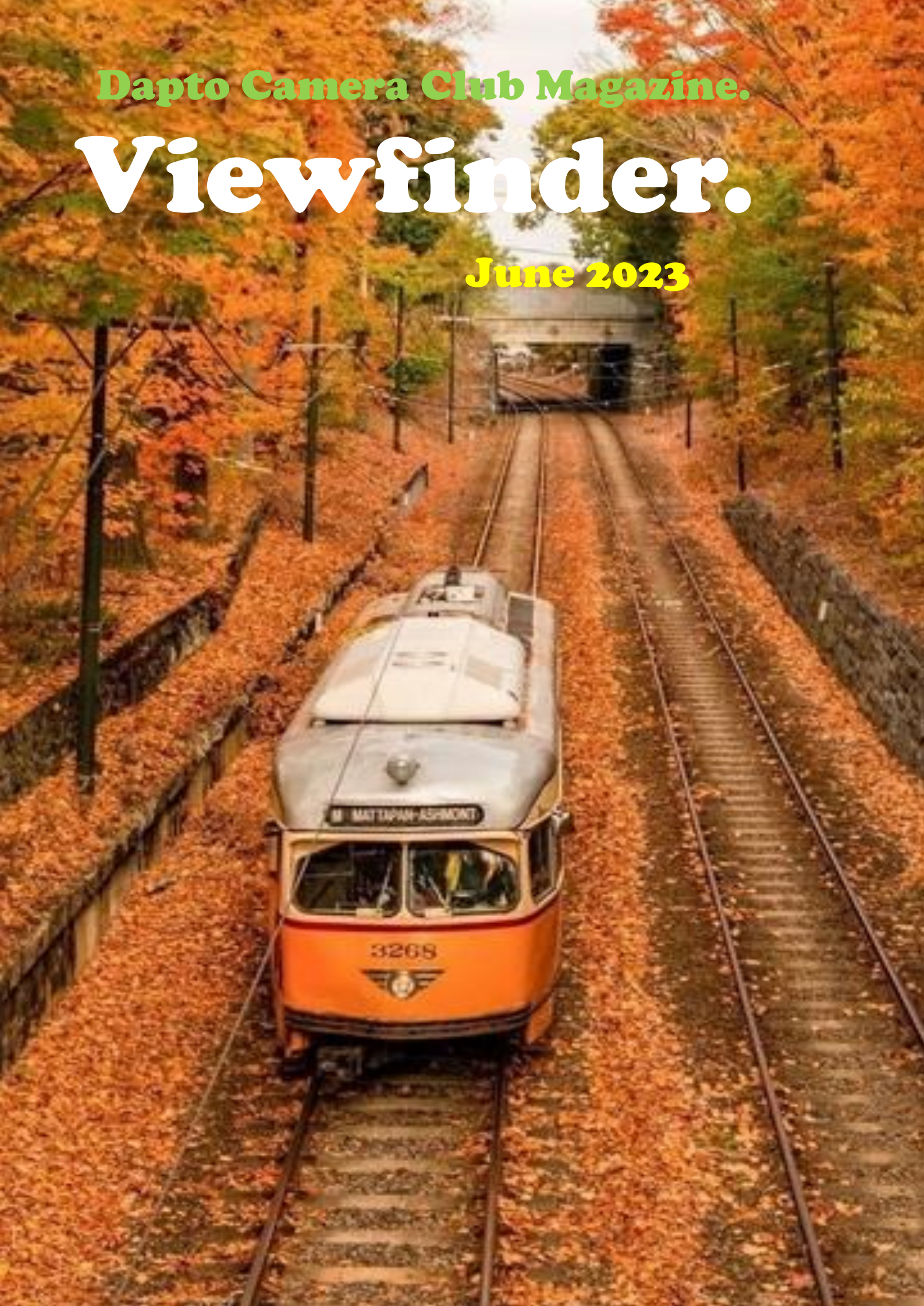


I've always been fascinated by birds. There's something about their beauty, grace, and freedom that just captures my imagination. So when I had the opportunity to go birdwatching with a friend, I jumped at the chance.

We met at a local park early in the morning, just as the sun was starting to rise. The air was cool and crisp, and the birds were already singing. We set up our cameras and tripods and started scanning the trees for our first subjects.

It didn't take long to find some birds. We saw robins, blue jays, cardinals, and even a few hawks. We spent the morning taking pictures of the birds in their natural habitat. It was amazing to see them up close and personal.

One of my favorite moments of the day was when we saw a family of ducks swimming in the pond. The ducklings were so cute and playful. We watched them for a while as they swam and quacked.

We had a great time birdwatching. It was a perfect way to spend a beautiful day outdoors. I learned a lot about birds and their habits, and I came away with some great photos. I'm already looking forward to my next birdwatching adventure.

Here are some tips for photographing birds:

Use a telephoto lens to get close-up shots.

Be patient and quiet. Birds are easily startled, so it's important to move slowly and make as little noise as possible.

Use a tripod to keep your camera steady. This will help you get sharper photos.

Experiment with different settings. The best settings for bird photography will vary depending on the lighting conditions and the type of bird you're photographing.

Have fun! Bird photography is a great way to get outdoors and enjoy nature.

This was written by BARD, Google's new [AI] LLM experience technology, when I asked it to write "A 200 word article on when, I went to take photos of birds". It took all of about 10 seconds.

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.

Oscar Rodrigano

How to Clean Camera Sensors:
The Secret to Safely and Effectively Cleaning Sensor Dust

Written by Diane Miller

Have you ever wondered what causes those mysterious spots that appear in your photos? For photographers, particularly those who use interchangeable lens cameras, this is a common occurrence. If you are constantly using your camera and switching lenses during photo shoots, then you've probably experienced this problem before. That's where learning how to clean your camera sensor can really help.

These mysterious spots are caused by dust or dirt on your sensor, which is completely normal and virtually unavoidable. To combat this problem, most camera makers have included a sensor cleaning function in newer camera models. However, sometimes this handy little feature just isn't enough, which is why cleaning the camera sensor is a painstaking chore that every photographer has to deal with every so often.

What is camera sensor dust?

Image via Shutterstock

The term sensor dust is used to describe the particles or elements that enter a camera and stick to its sensor. This usually happens when the camera user exposes the sensor by removing the body cap or switching lenses.

Camera sensors are dust magnets and notoriously prone to dust buildup if you're not careful, so you will inevitably have to clean your camera's sensor every so often, or once you start to discern those annoying spots on your photos.

Why is sensor dust a problem?

Image via Shutterstock

If you're not professionally selling your photos, sensor dust really isn't a big deal. As long as you're satisfied with the photos, you can just crop them out (if they're near the edges) or use Photoshop to get rid of them.

But if you're a professional photographer who takes hundreds of photos in a single photo shoot, these quick fixes aren't advisable since it would be too time-consuming to have to edit out sensor dust in every single picture. So, if you do this for a living, you'll have to keep your camera's sensor clean at all times.

Are self-cleaning sensors sufficient?

You can't always rely on new technology to assure you of a clean digital camera sensor. Many interchangeable lens cameras—DSLRs and MILCs—made in recent years have self-cleaning sensors that vibrate at ultrasonic speeds when the camera is turned on or off. This may help shake some of the dirt loose, but it shouldn't be a substitute for manual sensor cleaning.

With a self-cleaning sensor, you may not need to clean your sensor as often, but it still needs to be cleaned manually every once in a while, to ensure that it's completely dust-free. Some photographers usually send it in to the manufacturer's service center for cleaning, but due to the significant downtime (it will take a while for you to get your camera back) and the expensive cost, most just end up doing it themselves.

If you're planning on going the DIY route, you can find a lot of information online and elsewhere about how to clean camera sensors, but I believe my sensor cleaning method is more thorough than any others I've seen.
Even with self-cleaning, sensor spots are actually more of an issue today than they were a few years ago. Image manipulations such as HDR or the tone mapping-like contrast increases, including those in many popular filters such as those from Nik and Topaz, will show spots that you didn't notice before.

Is DIY sensor cleaning safe?

DIY sensor cleaning is completely safe. As long as you do it the right way, you shouldn't have any problems. Many photographers regularly do their own sensor cleaning without any issues. Yes, there's always the risk of damaging the sensor if done incorrectly, but if you take a few basic precautions and handle your sensor with care, the potential for damage is small.
There has been a lot of debate on the merits of do-it-yourself versus sending it out when it comes to cleaning sensors. Having it cleaned by professionals is ultimately the easier option, but as previously mentioned, it will cost you money and you won't be able to use your camera for a certain period of time. I personally want to be able to clean my sensor whenever necessary, which can be at inconvenient times, and I want to have it done quickly. And, frankly, I think I'd do a better job than anyone else.
Sensor cleaning can be tedious, and it's a job that you wouldn't want to entrust to just anyone. Sometimes it gets worse before it gets better, but I'll stay at it until I'm satisfied with the results.
Knowing how to clean your own camera sensor is not only economical and convenient, but ultimately more effective and thorough because you are doing the work yourself. You can save a bundle (you'll only need to spend on a reliable camera cleaning kit) and do a better job by cleaning your camera's sensor yourself.

How to check if your sensor is dirty

It's easy to find out how dirty the sensor is by shooting a clear sky or a clean piece of paper. It will give you an idea of what you'll need to clone out on the images, as well as how badly you need to clean the sensor.

1. Shoot a sensor check image

- Set your lowest "normal range" ISO (100 for Canon and 200 for Nikon). Don't set a lower ISO that is in the "extended range." You'll get the lowest noise at your lowest normal ISO.
- You want the shot to be out of focus, so set manual focus and focus to infinity for a piece of paper and close-focus for the sky.
- Set to f/22, so you can see any spots. At a wider aperture such as f/5.6, they may not show, and at a smaller aperture such as f/32, you may see too much detail. (The spots are shadows of stuff that is on a glass surface in front of the sensor itself.)
- If you're shooting a piece of paper indoors, you'll have a slow shutter speed. That's fine; you want to blur the subject as much as possible anyway, so go ahead and hand hold. Remember, you just want to shoot featureless light.
- You want a somewhat telephoto focal length to shoot a small segment of the target and to minimize any tonal gradients. It depends on the evenness of the illumination of your target, of course, but 70-100 mm is usually fine.

If you're a JPEG shooter, make sure you're using the highest quality and largest file size. (I would hope you are, anyway.)

2. post-process to find the spots

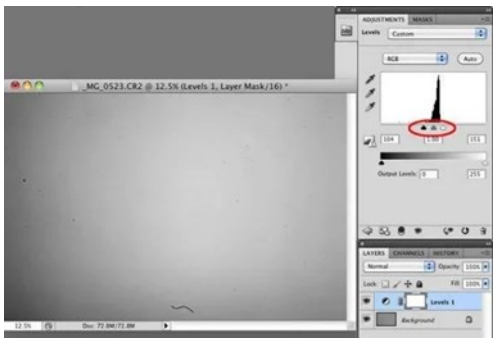
Now here's what to do with the test image (just looking at it on the back of the camera will show the really awful spots):

- Open the image on the computer and desaturate, either in the RAW converter or in Photoshop.
- You might see some spots at this point, but to really see what's there:
  - Make a Levels adjustment layer above your Background image.
  - Go to Layer > New Adjustment Layer > Levels, or use the black and white circle icon at the bottom of the Layers panel/palette.
- In the Layer adjustment, the narrowness of the histogram peak will indicate how much tonal gradient you've captured. The narrower, the better, but no need to get it super narrow.

Increase contrast by bringing in the two end sliders to meet the ends of the peak, and you'll really see what's on the sensor. You'll also see some darkening in the corners due to the normal light falloff in the lens.
Image via Diane Miller

Here, you can see a piece of lint bottom-center and a spot on the left. There are many more spots that you can't see in this small web image.
The image a lens projects onto the sensor is upside-down, and when the camera processes the image, it's flipped right side up. So the image of the sensor you see is flipped, and the piece of lint is actually at the top of the sensor
Seeing something like this, you know you need to clean the sensor. Find the item in your camera menu that flips up the mirror and lets you access the sensor.

What to do before cleaning the sensor?



1. Make sure you have a fully charged battery

If the battery runs out while you're working in the sensor chamber, the mirror will slap down and you'll have to deal with a very expensive repair. The same goes for inadvertently nudging the card door enough to "open" it.

2. Clean your camera's exterior body

It's important that you clean the outside before you move on to what's inside. If you fail to do so, dust particles could enter your sensor.

3. Observe cleanliness in the area

Make sure that the place where you're going to clean your DSLR camera sensor is clean and dust-free. You don't want more dust to add to the dirt that you're trying to remove.

4. Gather all the necessary tools

You don't want to start the sensor cleaning process and then realize later on that you don't have a certain tool. If you don't own a complete camera cleaning kit yet, make sure to gather all the needed sensor cleaning tools before you proceed.

Dry cleaning method for camera sensor:

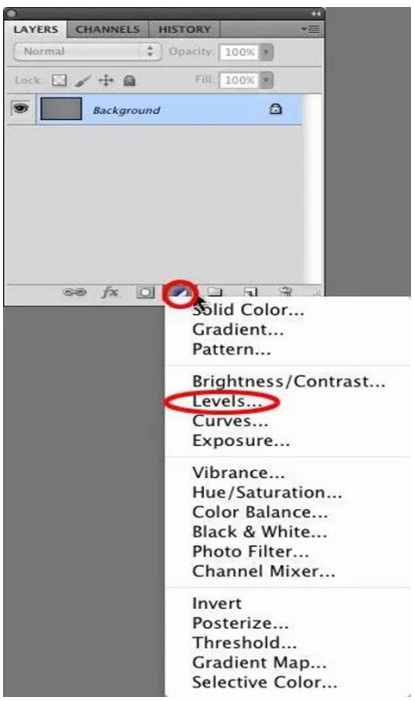
Tools for dry cleaning your camera sensor:

1. Manual air blower to eliminate bigger dust particles

Sensor scope to check for uncleared spots

How to clean camera sensor using the dry method:

Lay the camera down on a table instead of holding it. Don't touch anything as you clean. When I see large dust pieces, I start the cleaning process by blowing on the sensor with an air bulb such as the Giotto's rocket air blaster. (Doing so allows me to safely hold the camera and turn it upside down because the bulb tip doesn't have to be inside the chamber). *Reminder: Never use canned air; the propellant can create a residue on the sensor that will probably need professional removal. Large pieces will often blow off and fall out of the chamber.*



1. I'll blow on the mirror before I put it up. And I'll blow off the back of the lens, too. There's so much dust everywhere; I might as well get rid of whatever I can. The sensor has an electrostatic charge when the camera is on in its normal mode (but not in sensor cleaning mode) and it will attract dust like a magnet.

At this point, I find a sensor scope very handy. It's a magnifying glass with a light shining on the sensor (I like the Delkin sensor scope). You'll see sensor dust as tiny silver threads or spots.

1. I'll repeat the air bulb and sensor scope check until I've gotten what I can, and then shoot a piece of paper to see if I had any luck blowing off some of the smaller spots. Usually, the answer is no.

I'll go after the smaller spots that I can see only in the Photoshop image. They may look much less significant, but they'll show up when you do many image manipulations. You'll want to zoom in on the image to see these smaller spots.

Here's a 50% zoom of the above sensor check image. This is not a good thing. The smallest and lightest spots aren't of much significance, but the others are.

Image via Diane Miller

Wet cleaning method for camera sensor:

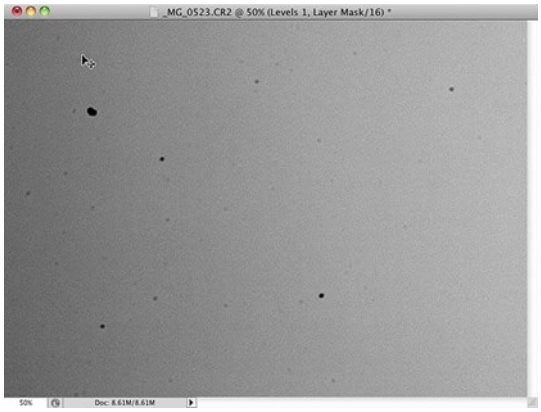
If that happens, the next step is to use a sensor cleaning brush. These are very special brushes whose bristles hold an electrostatic charge and attract particles off the sensor, rather than "sweeping" them off, so only a light touch is needed.
Reminder: you need to keep these brushes very clean. You charge them right before use by blowing on the bristles with a squeeze bulb or by spinning the bristles with the battery-powered Visible Dust Arctic Butterfly. (Do not spin it while it is in the sensor chamber).

Tools for wet cleaning your DSLR camera sensor:

I use sensor cleaning products from Visible Dust, but I can't claim they're better than any other:
Arctic Butterfly brush

1. Green swabs

Sensor Clean solution



Smear Away solvents

How to clean camera sensor using the wet method:

There is information on the manufacturer's website about sensor cleaning and proper use of its products. And the solvents (or at least some of them) are said to leave a coating on the sensor that helps repel dust and minimizes dust build-up.
Here are the steps to wet clean your sensor:

1. Read the product directions very carefully.
2. The swabs should be kept very clean and should be carefully moistened right on the edge, with two drops of solvent, each one placed one-fourth of the way in from the edge, to evenly wet the edge.
3. Let the solvent soak in a minute or so before swabbing. You don't want to squeeze out liquid on the sensor glass.

Tilt the swab and drag it in one pass from one edge of the sensor to the other, and then turn it over and drag it back the other way, so the other side of the edge is being used. (Check the manufacturer's website for video demos.) You'll need some pressure with the swab, unlike the brush.

When to use the Smear Away and Sensor Clean solvent:

Brushing usually won't remove all the spots, and you'll need to resort to swabs and solvents. After brushing, you'll need to repeat the shot of the sky or a piece of paper, and if you see an elongated smear, you've brushed through an oil spot thrown by the shutter.
In this case, you'll need to clean the brush in its recommended manner before using it again, and you'll need to use solvents to remove the oil.

- If I see an oil smear, I use the Smear Away solvent, which needs to be followed by the Sensor Clean solvent. The swabs may leave lint, so another loupe inspection is in order, followed by the blower and if, needed, the brush. (I have two, so if I brush through oil, I can continue cleaning.)

If there is no oil smear, I just use Sensor Clean. Regardless of the solvent, it may take several passes, each with a clean swab, to get everything clean. And junk may be pulled in from the edges of the sensor, making things worse before they get better. But they'll get better.

Finishing steps in cleaning a camera sensor:

At the stage when I can no longer see any dust or spots with the loupe, I repeat the sensor check by shooting a piece of plain paper again. It may take several repetitions to get things clean, but I think it's worth the trouble.
Sometimes, you'll see a much larger and dimmer spot on the sensor. Mine are always hexagonal, reflecting the aperture leaves in the lens. These are not on the sensor but are bits of dust or dirt on the lens, either the front or rear surfaces.
It's very important to keep the rear element of the lens and the sensor loupe clean, as dust can jump or fall from them onto the sensor.
There are also products to clean the walls of the sensor chamber. Although there's no easy way to assess their effectiveness, I'm in favor of keeping things as clean as I can.

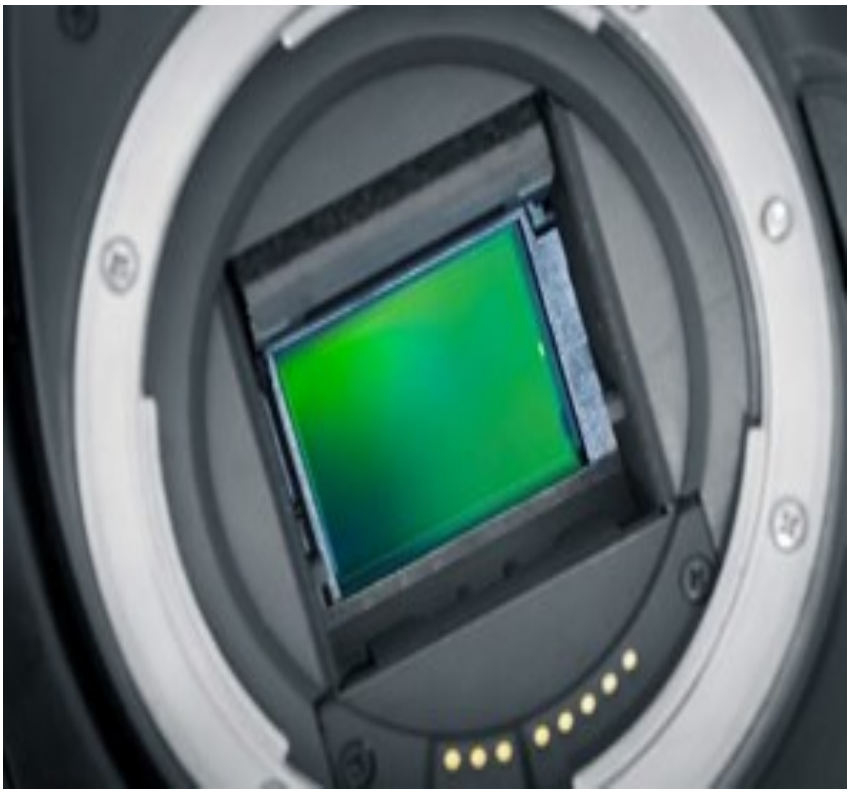
Tips to keep your camera sensor clean:

Image via Shutterstock

Prevention is the ultimate cure. If you don't want to constantly worry about sensor dust, you need to take steps to prevent it from finding its way into your camera.

1. When changing lenses, make sure it's done in a clean place where there's still air. Always point the camera toward the ground, so the dust particles (if there are any) won't land on your DSLR's sensor.
2. Avoid unnecessary changing of lenses. Also, make sure that the lens cap is clean before covering up your lens optics.

Make sure your camera's bag is clean. Clean it once in a while to avoid dirt and dust build-up.



The sensor cleaning process can be tedious. But how confident will you be that, if you send your camera out to be cleaned, it will be done with sufficient attention to detail? At least, now you have a means to check it after the fact.

Camera sensor cleaning: Frequently asked questions

Can I clean a sensor with alcohol?

It all depends on your definition of "alcohol". The popular Eclipse brand of sensor cleaning solutions use either methanol or a combination of isopropyl alcohol, ethanol, and methanol. You should carefully read the contents of any alcohol solution you might want to use to clean your sensor. For example, the isopropyl alcohol you can pick up at the local pharmacy contains some glycerine which can leave a residue on our sensor. The residue may be difficult or impossible to remove with conventional methods.

My general advice is if you are unsure about the safety or efficacy of a solution, avoid using it on your expensive sensor.

Can I clean my cameras sensor with a cloth?

You should avoid cleaning the camera sensor with a piece of cloth or microfiber cloth. Sometimes the cloth itself can shed off small pieces which will leave more particulate matter on the sensor. This is the exact opposite effect you're going for. Also, if any solid particle is trapped in the cloth, rubbing it on the delicate imaging sensor may damage it (eg, leave a scratch).

It's always advisable to use dedicated sensor pads to clean the sensor. Before you rub the sensor with anything, be sure to use a blower to remove any large pieces of foreign bodies. These may also cause scratches as you apply light pressure with the pad.

What happens if you touch a camera sensor?

As a simplification, think of the camera sensor as the front element of your lens. If your touch your camera lens, you may create some smudging or leave behind some oily residue (fingerprints). Many modern-day cameras have a thin layer of IR and or anti-aliasing filter on top of the sensor. So, you might actually be touching one these filters rather than the sensor itself. This is a good thing, because it's easier and less expensive to repair or replace one of these filters than the sensor.

The oily residue is more difficult to remove than simple dust particles. It may take several attempts with the sensor cleaning kit before all the imperfections are removed.

Please Note.

It is advisable NOT to pour the cleaning fluid into the lens opening on the front of your camera when cleaning the sensor. This tends to be very expensive.

11 things that I think you should know right now.

I've made more mistakes that I can count over my 11 years in photography, and I definitely took longer to get where I wanted to be because of them!
I'm going to hazard a guess that actually, you're a lot like me back then - you want to get great photos, and you want them NOW.
Because of that, it can be tempting to try to take shortcuts, or hope that if you can just save up enough to get that new lens / camera, *that* will make all the difference, or keep on endlessly searching the internet for a hidden pearl of wisdom or "secret" from a photographer you admire, that will make it all come together for you.
Which is why I want to share with you 11 things that I think you should know right now, from the get go - things I wish that someone had told me (or at least, that I had listened to 😂)
And hey, if you're NOT a new photographer, but still struggling to get the images you see in your head, this is still for you - because maybe one of these is the culprit that's holding you back.
Wherever you are, I want to save your time, your energy, your bandwidth, and yes, even your money, so that you can get to where you want to be faster, and with less frustration.
So let's dive in…

1.There's a lot to learn!

You've probably come to realise this already - there is SO much to learn in photography if you want to take "good" photos with your DSLR or mirrorless camera!
That's because you want to learn several things, almost simultaneously, like how to take control of the camera yourself by choosing your own exposure, your own focus modes and your own white balance settings. You also want to learn about light, and where best to place your subject in relation to it, and about composition, so you can get images that are interesting and engaging.
And that's not even getting started on the editing side of things!
I know many new photographers get overwhelmed because of the sheer amount of information to absorb, but the good news is, you can totally make this manageable, by **not trying to learn everything at once.**
Which leads me neatly onto….

2. Take it one step at a time

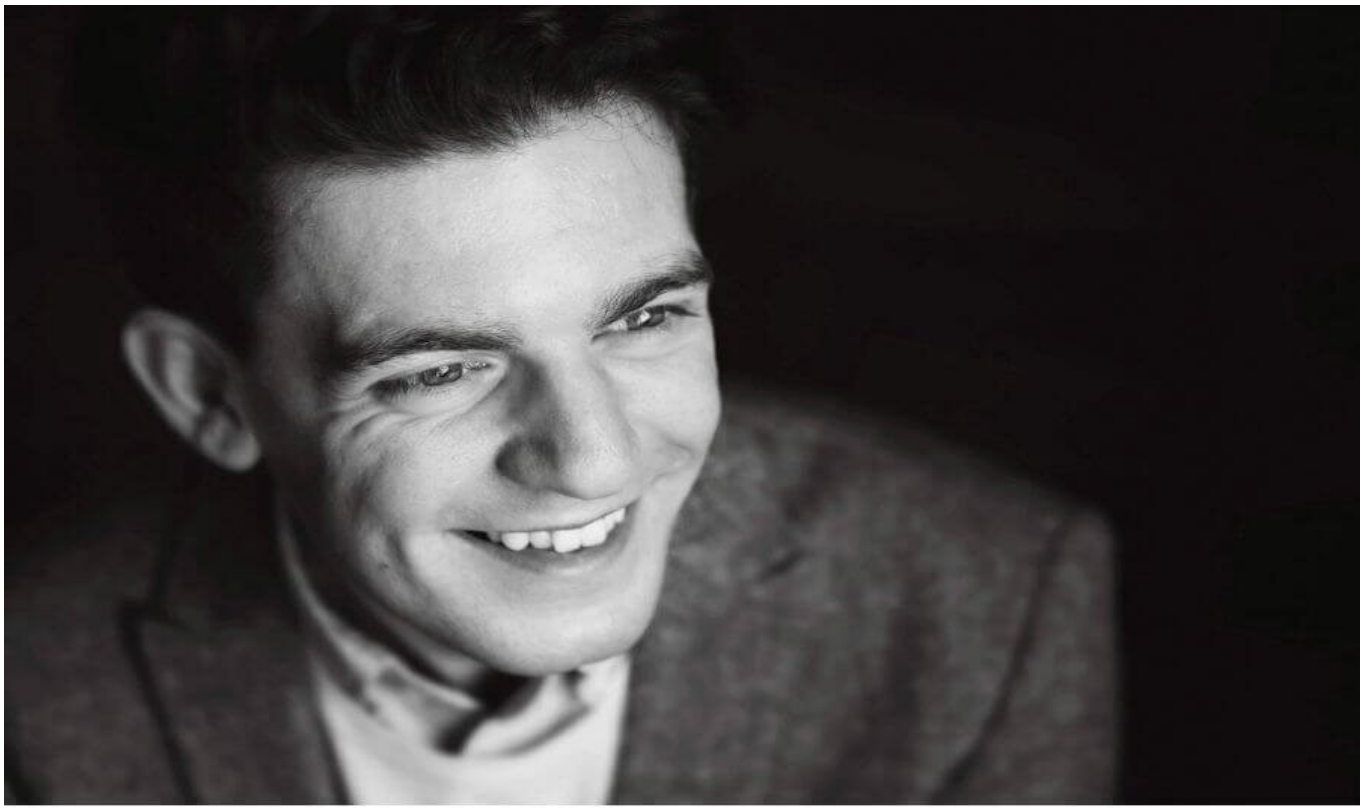
It's easy to get frustrated when learning photography, because you can feel like you are picking up so much information, but nothing's coming together, and you STILL can't get the image you see in your head!

It's usually because you're reading lots of "tip" and "tricks" which don't go together, so you're trying to do Step 10 when you haven't fully learnt Step 2 😅
That's exactly what happened to me, and SO many of my **Auto to Awesome** students, so if that's where you are now, I know exactly how you feel, and you are definitely not unique!
My advice is to break it down into more manageable chunks by getting yourself a proper learning curriculum, just like you would if you wanted to learn anything else.
That way, you're learning things in the order they need to be learnt, so that you're not skipping ahead and missing all those bits of information that connect the dots and helps it all make sense.

3. Shooting in manual mode matters

When I was first starting out, I knew I had to move away from the AUTO mode if I wanted to get better photos, so I started shooting in Aperture Priority Mode, and stayed there for about 3 years.
I thought that as I was choosing my own aperture and ISO, and the camera only had to choose one setting for me, it was going to give me enough control to get the photos I wanted, and I couldn't see the point it making that final step to manual mode.
It was at this point I really thought about giving it up, because although my photos were okay, there were definitely certain images I just couldn't get, and worse, I didn't know what I needed to do to get them.
Turns out, learning how to shoot in manual mode was *critical.*
I can't say I wasn't told this, because I was, over and over again, but I just didn't understand what huge difference it would make until I actually made the switch.
This was a comment from one of my Auto to Awesome students that says it all:

Learning how to use manual mode correctly was a turning point for me in photography, as it was when was able to get those images that I hadn't been able to previously.
So if you want to save yourself from 3 years of frustration, move from Auto to Aperture Priority Mode, and *then take that final step by switching to manual mode.*
You'll be so glad you did!



4. Light is THE key component of any image

Another thing I wish I had paid more attention to was the LIGHT, but the truth is, until you have mastered manual mode, it's hard to master light.
That's why in my **Auto to Awesome** program you learn how to shoot in manual mode FIRST, then we immediately move onto how to use light, because the two are intrinsically linked.
Truly learning about light does take some time, but you can definitely make a good start in just a week or so, by learning some key strategies of how to use available light in different situations.

You'll continue to learn and experiment with light throughout your photography journey, so this is never a one and done scenario, but just getting some basics down will move your images from meh to wow in seconds!

5. Don't fear using a high ISO

This is another one I hear ALL the time - you don't want to push your ISO number *too* high because you've heard that in order to get less noise in your images, you need to use a low ISO.

Now that IS true - high ISO's can lead to more noise in an image, but it's even more important to remember 2 things:

1) When you keep your ISO low and it results in an underexposed image, you will actually have MORE noise than if you'd kept the ISO high and exposed correctly.

2) When you keep your ISO low and you end up lowering your shutter speed to counteract it, you'll get "soft" images due to motion blur. You can't fix motion blur in editing but you CAN fix noise, so it's far better to have a noisy image than a soft one.

Moral of the story: use the ISO number you need to get the correct exposure, and have your other settings where you want them, and don't worry about using a higher number than you would like!

6. Don't worry about editing for now

Although I did just mention editing (I did, didn't i?!) don't worry too much about editing when you are still learning your camera and about light.

I spent an INSANE amount of time editing my photos in the beginning, which basically involved me trying to make a silk purse out of a sow's ear.

I'd spend hours trying to fix all the problems that shouldn't have been there if I'd just learnt my camera properly, and realised that an image with bad light and composition can't be magically made better by a little editing.

Focus first on learning the basics - what we spoke about back in number one of this list - and then, when you are getting beautiful exposed, tack sharp images that use light and composition beautifully *in camera,* you can then go and learn how to edit to take them to the next level. But get that baseline great in-camera first.

Ideally, you will want to learn how to take the steering wheel and drive your editing program yourself, rather than relying on presets or actions, because that's the BEST way of bringing your photo to life, but that's another rant for another day :)

7. You don't need expensive gear

Photographers love a bit of lens or equipment talk, so it's easy to get caught up in the feeling of *"If only I had that lens, or a better camera body, then my images would look more like theirs"*

I know it's tempting to hope for quick fix - we lead such busy lives that we have to take shortcuts where we can - but a better camera or lens will not automatically fix your image problems.
Doing what I mentioned already - learning your camera, shooting in manual mode, and learning about light - is what is needed to make your images look better.
That's not to say that upgraded gear is worthless (of course not!) but it can only give you back what you put in - a $3,000 camera on AUTO will give you roughly the same results as a $600 camera on AUTO. If you're not getting tack sharp images with your entry level gear, a new camera will not make them any sharper. If you're using sh*tty light, using a top of the line pro camera will not make it any better.
Forget about gear until you have those basics down, then upgrade later when you'll actually get the benefit of it!

8. There's more to sharp photos than just "tips"

Another source of frustration for new photographers is FOCUS - or rather a lack of it!
It's SO annoying isn't it?! You look at the image on the back of the camera and it looks sharp….but then you zoom in on the computer and you realise that the image is ever so slightly annoyingly SOFT. Again.
I was once that person frantically asking random people in Facebook groups WHY ARE MY PHOTOS SOFT but although I would get some super lovely people giving me helpful tips and tricks, it never really solved the problem.
That's because everything in photography is connected, so it's only when you get all the pieces of the puzzle working *together* that you'll be able to increase that hit rate of keepers, even with large groups or crazed, erratic toddlers.
Tips and tricks is like putting a band-aid on a gunshot wound - instead, learn the fundamentals, and your focus problems will go away!

9. You'll get worse before you get better

It has to be said that if you take my advice and move away from the safety of having the camera make all the decisions for you, and instead, take control yourself, there will be a period when you feel like you're getting worse. Because you are.
I want you to know this is 100% normal.
A good analogy is to think of it like learning to walk.
You don't just move from crawling to walking instantly, you take a few tentative steps…..and then fall over. Before falling over again. And then bashing your head off the coffee table and wailing.
And even when you do kinda get the hang of being on two legs, it's actually taking you *longer* to get to where you want to be than if you had just crawled there.
But you (or at least your parents) were smart enough to realise that you had to go through that in order to

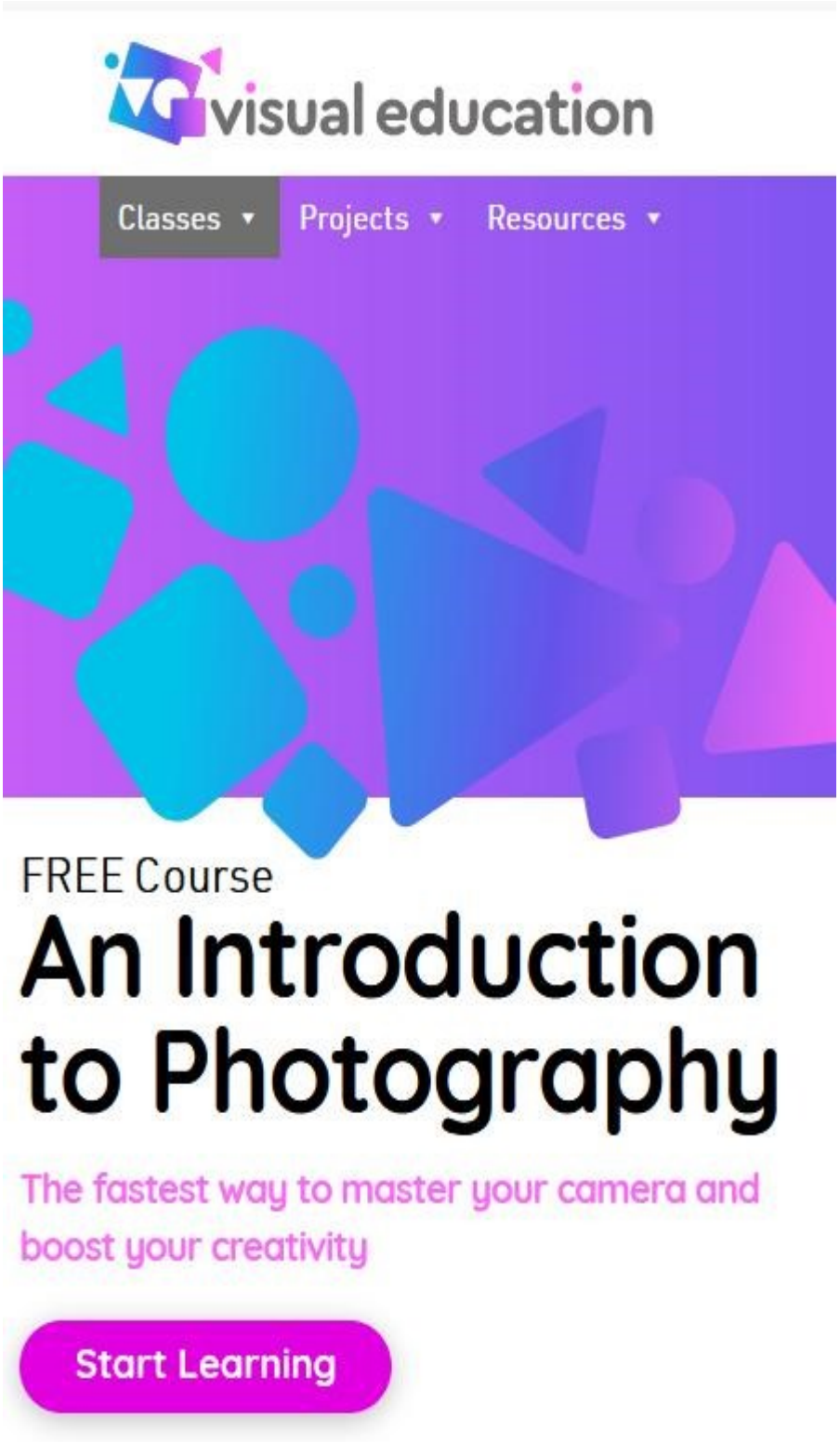
grow. Failing is just part and parcel of learning something new.
But once you've learnt how to walk, you'll never ever revert back to crawling again. (well, perhaps occasionally on a Saturday night after too many margaritas)
All that to say, just push through it, accept the fact you need to get worse before you can get better, and you'll reap the rewards.

10. Not every images needs to be wall-worthy

Not every single photo you take needs to be a masterpiece. You can create photos that are just for you, and are more about capturing a memory than winning any awards.
You can also take photos that you intended to come better than they were, but just turned out to be something bland and forgettable. Who cares?
When you look at photographers on Instagram or in their portfolios, you are only seeing their "best" or at least their "better than average"
But you aren't seeing the 100's of photos on their hard drive that were just OK, or didn't nail the spot.
Everyone takes average photos - and some may downright suck - so never think that just because you aren't cranking out amazing photo after amazing photo you're doing something wrong - that's just what it means to do anything creative.

11. Don't get distracted

We live in a world where there has never been so much easy access to information, from places like blogs, Facebook groups, podcasts, forums, Instagram and Pinterest….yet all that happens is we feel overwhelmed and bombarded from every corner.
The best advice I can leave you with is this: try your very, very best to only focus on the next step in our journey, and block out everything else that doesn't help you reach that next step.
I can tell you this: if you keep getting waylaid by different things you find in blog posts or in Facebook groups, then it will take you 10 times as long to learn photography, and make the journey 10 times harder.
All that zipping around may *feel* like you're getting somewhere, but don't confuse activity with accomplishment.
The shortcut to great photographs is not is a set of hidden tricks, or getting a quick tip from a pro that is going to make everything look amazing: It is about about learning the steps in a logical and linked path.
It's about taking the time to truly learn your craft - and the surprising thing is, when you commit to THAT, instead of endlessly searching for something that will help you get there faster or cheaper, you'll find that your photography path actually shrinks, and you'll get there before you know it.



https://visualeducation.com/free-photography-course/

5 Reasons a Phone Camera Rocks for Street Photograph

by Lightstalking.com

Besides all the kinds of photography starting from landscapes to night sky photography that a smartphone is capable of, more and more photographers are now using it for street photography and it is one of the most perfect tools for this genre

It Is Great for Quick Shots

When you are out in the streets and you see something happening, you sometimes have chances of losing the moment if you have to reach out for the camera, remove the lens cap if it is on and then make any settings, especially when shooting in manual mode. The iPhone and other smartphones have the option to quickly access the camera from the lock screen and get the shot so you are always ready to photograph the scene in front of you.

These qualities make the phone cameras a great tool for capturing moments instantly on the street. They are even great when you are a passenger in a car, to capture something through the window, but make sure you do this with safety in mind for you and the driver. Of course, there are some limitations, but with practice, street photography with a smartphone gets better.

The Exposure and Focus Lock Feature are Great

A lot of street photographers like to pre-focus the scene and even lock exposure settings in areas where the light is not changing that much. These features will help you to be ready in situations where you are waiting in anticipation of something that is going to happen. These features are handy for situations like these.

You Can Use the Camera with Cable Release

The iPhone's earphone or headset comes with a feature where the volume up and down button can be used as a shutter release button for the camera app when connected. It can also be used for burst shots.

This feature will help to capture photographs without even having to touch the shutter release

button on the iPhone. This way, you can remain more discreet when capturing photos on the streets.

Long Exposure Is a Breeze

With an iPhone, long exposure can be a very quick creative exposure. There are some street scenes that will work well with long exposure to show how busy the street is or to capture a dynamic shot. You just need to set your camera to capture live photos, capture the shot, and then set the option to long exposure. Make sure you hold the mobile still for 2 seconds without any movement for the resulting image to turn out perfectly fine.

If you have a mini tripod (again can be carried in a pocket) then you can set the mobile somewhere stable to get the shot. You can even make use of long exposure apps for capturing longer exposures.

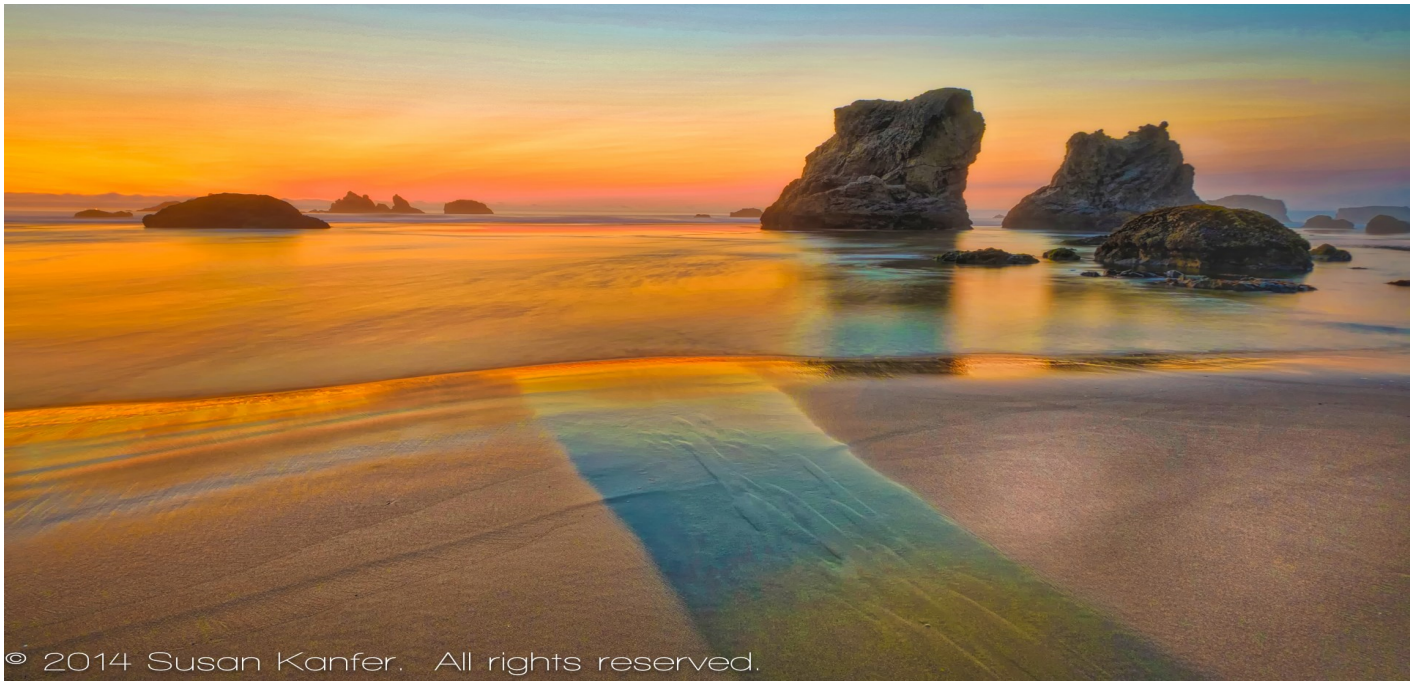
You Can Stay Discreet

In recent years, we see that most people on the streets are on their phones doing something with it. So, it is easier to take their photographs, if it is storytelling, or it is easier for you to use the phone for photography because not many people are going to notice you.

People notice when you point a camera at someone or something, but do not care much if you point your phone. Moreover, you can also stay in the midst of other people discreetly and capture interesting street shots. Some may even mistake capturing a photo for a selfie as it is quite common these days.

Six tips to improve your beach sunset shots

By Susan Kanfer



Here are some tips to improve your sunset shots.

Bracket

Sunset exposures can be tricky. With bracketing, you have a better chance of getting a properly exposed image. Or you may decide to merge images by blending layers or using HDR software such as Aurora HDR. Spot meter on the sky, not the sun. If you don’t want to bracket, slightly underexpose your images to bring in richer colours.

Move around, get your feet wet

Don’t just stay on the dry part of the beach. Wear water shoes or waterproof boots and walk a little closer

on the sand toward the water, so the surf tickles over the top of your feet. Turn around. Look for images behind you and to the side. Check out reflections on the sand, people, animals and landscapes. Stoop low, shoot up. Stand high, shoot down. Change the horizon line. Keeping it in the middle can get pretty boring. Switch your lens, based on your subject. A big sun, go telephoto. A vast landscape considers wide-angle.

Experiment with filters

In particular, graduated neutral density and neutral density. Graduated neutral density filters are gray on the top half and clear on the bottom. They darken the sky while allowing you to expose for detail in the shadow areas in the lower part of your image. Neutral density filters reduce light over the whole image, so you can slow down your shutter speed thus softening and blurring the water.

Stack filters — use more than one. Your shutter speed might get pretty slow, so don't forget your tripod and cable release. Try filters with different stops, to see how the stops affect your image. Graduated filters typically come in 1-4 stops. Neutral density filters come with many more stops, up to even 20. Or you can get a variable neutral density filter with a number of stops. The key is to experiment. Have fun trying different settings, filters and combinations of filters if you stack them.

Come early, stay late

Plan on arriving at least 45 minutes before sunset and leaving 45 minutes after. Look for the beach action before the sunset, and the deep, saturated colours after. Many times, the colours are better if you patiently wait a while after the sun has dipped below the horizon. And always look for clouds. Dramatic clouds can make or break an image.

Look for an anchor point

Find something in the foreground. Rocks, a surfer, a silhouette, whatever pulls your interest. Pay attention to the timing of waves, as they move in and out, cresting high and low, and how the waves affect your anchor point. Wait and be prepared for the wave action you visualize for your image.

Safety always comes first.

Protect your eyes — don't look straight into the sun through your lens. Don't stand close to or in the water when there are dangerous riptides, rip currents or undertows, or where a wave could wipe out you or your equipment. Protect your feet with shoes or waterproof boots. Rocks and shells can cut the bottom of your feet, and stingray's sting. Protect your equipment. Keep it in a camera bag unless in use.

Don't leave equipment on the beach. Sand is bad for a camera plus the incoming tide might cover it with water. Use rain protection for ocean spray. Be mindful of dangerous weather conditions and listen to life-

guard warnings. Always pay attention to your surroundings and the incoming waves. Use common sense when dealing with Mother Nature.

Photo Basics: Capture clear photos

By Robin

Now, I'll teach you all about focus and why your photos may not be as sharp as you'd like them to be. This morning, I got an email from one of the students in my Photography Start Course who said she spent $2,000 on an expensive camera and another $1,500 on a high-end lens. Still, her pictures don't look as sharp as she would like them to, and wondered why that is. I have to admit that I get this type of question SO OFTEN that I dedicated an entire WEEK of training in my beginner class to teach how to get crystal clear and sharp photos.

It is not uncommon for photographers to think that something *must* be wrong with their equipment if the photos don't come out sharp, but most of the time I find that the reason is simply a product of mistakes the photographer makes when shooting. You can avoid those issues by understanding how to properly focus your camera.

The #1 focusing mistake of beginning photographers

The #1 mistake I see from beginning photographers in terms of getting clear pictures is that they aren't being precise with their focus. I often ask students where they are focusing, and I get answers like, “On the model's face.” The fact of the matter is that “the face” is far too large of an area to focus on for intimate portraits.

Suppose you're taking a portrait of someone. Now that you've learned how to use shallow depth-of-field from the second part of this series, you want to use it all the time in your portraits to get a creamy background behind the subject. This means you're usually shooting your portraits at f/2.8 or a similar low aperture.

Suppose that you're using a 100mm lens and standing 7 feet (2.1 meters) from the subject. Did you know

that, with these settings, only 1.4 inches (3.5 centimeters) of the photo is sharp? That means that, if you focus on the person's cheek, their eyes and nose will be partially blurry.
So if you want your photos to come out crystal clear and sharp, you need to focus PRECISELY and make sure you have enough depth-of-field to make the subject come out sharp.
When shooting portraits, you will almost always focus on the person's eye, since that is where the viewer of the photo will look first. For landscape photographers, check out this article on where to focus in landscape photography.

How to focus on one spot

When you were shooting in automatic mode on your camera, the camera would automatically find the subject and focus for you. Now that you're shooting manually, it's time to take control of your focus as well.
Your camera ALWAYS focuses on one specific spot in the scene. It is physically impossible for a lens to focus on two spots at once. When you look through your viewfinder, you see a bunch of dots (Canon) or small boxes (Nikon). Those markings show you where the camera is focusing. This spot generally blinks red when the camera sets focus.
In the picture below, I chose to focus on the ant on the flower, since that is where I wanted people to look. To do this, I set the camera to spot focus and used the four-way selector on the back of my DSLR to move the focus point onto the ant.

Notice the red illuminated focus point right on the ant? That's where I'm setting the focus for this shot.
Sometimes, the spot in the picture where you want to focus will not have a focus point available. This is especially true on entry-level Canon Rebel or Nikon D3500 DSLRs, which do not have many focus points.

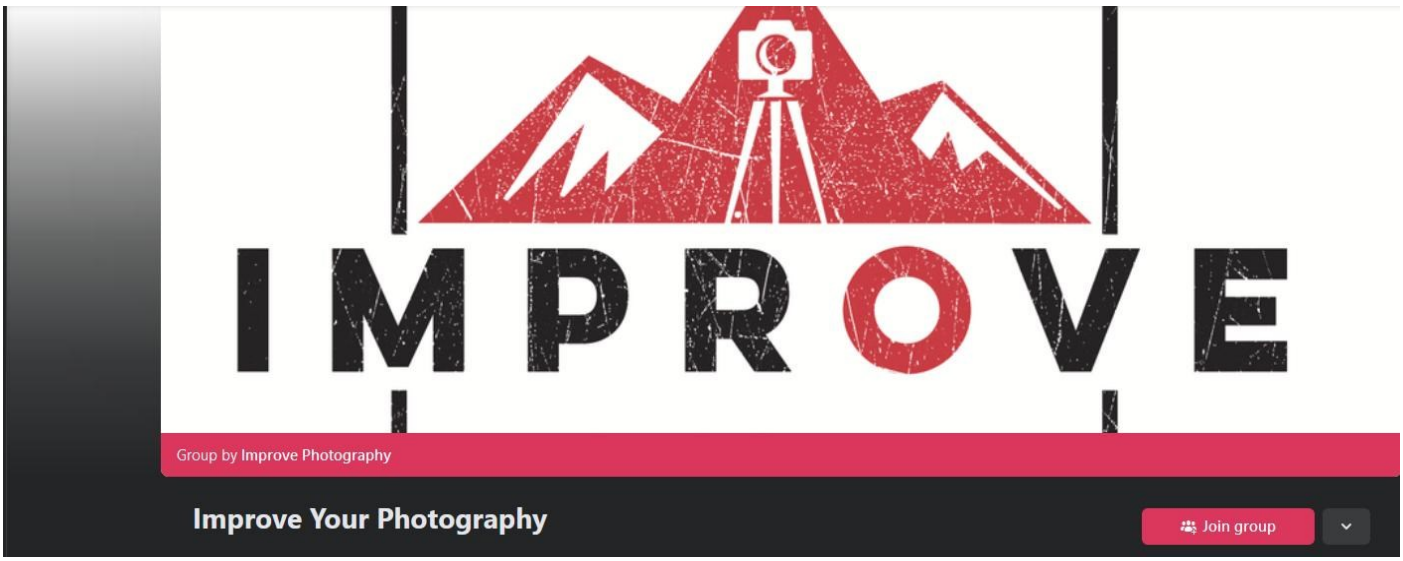
Focus Selections

I hope I didn't confuse you earlier when I said that the camera can ONLY focus on one specific spot in the photo. There are ways that you can activate multiple focus points at once, but in doing so, the camera is just choosing the best of both worlds and compromising between the focus selections to set the focus in the middle somewhere.
99% of the time when I'm out shooting, I use spot focus, which allows me to move around the focus point in the viewfinder. My thumb has become adept at constantly moving around the focus point using the four-way selector on the back of the camera as I compose a shot through the viewfinder. Spot focus is great be-

cause you have exact control over where the focus is placed.
However, there are other focus selection options on most DSLR cameras. Other than spot focus, you have the ability to choose a small group of between 3 and 5 focus points and tell the camera to choose the best of those points, or you could set your camera to determine which focus point to use all on its own.
I never let the camera take control of focus–it's a recipe for blurry pictures. When I'm shooting sports or fast-moving wildlife, I'll sometimes set the camera to use any of the centre area focus points and choose the best one, because the action happens faster than I can move the focus point.
Although there are certainly situations to use other focus selections, I would encourage you to use spot focus and get used to constantly moving around the focus point around the frame as you shoot for the next few months.

Focus Modes

Aside from selecting which focus point(s) the camera is using, you also need to set which type of autofocus the camera will use. For most uses, you'll want to leave your camera on "AF-S" (Nikon) or "One Shot" (Canon). This means that the camera will acquire focus when you press half-way down on the shutter button, and then take the picture when you finish pressing all the way down on the shutter button.
The other main option is continuous focus (displayed on the camera as "AF-C" for Nikon cameras and "AI Servo" for Canon cameras). This mode is used when the subject is moving. Suppose you're shooting a soccer player running toward you. If you use one shot, then the camera focuses when you press half way down on the shutter, and by the time you finish pressing all the way down, the camera takes the picture. In that split second, the athlete will have moved, so the picture will not turn out sharp. Continuous focus (AF-C or AI SERVO) means that the camera continues to find focus all the way up to the instant that you snap the picture.
So why wouldn't you want to use continuous focus all the time? Because it's slightly less precise than one shot. So, here's the rule… use one shot ("AF-S" on Nikon, and "One Shot" on Canon) for all shots where the subject is reasonably still like landscapes or most portraits. Use continuous focus ("AF-C" on Nikon, and "AI Servo" on Canon) for all fast-moving shots.
Note: Canon users will also see the option for "AI Focus" when choosing a focus mode. There is a specific use for this, but honestly, it's just outdated technology. I have tried it extensively even in the best-case scenarios for this focus mode and have always achieved better results with AI Servo.



Improve your Photography is a Facebook group site.

Photography can be lonely. Sometimes we feel like we don't have anyone to turn to with our day to day issues.
The Improve Your Photography group is a special place where you can connect with both like-minded photographers and photographers that will give you an entirely new perspective.
We can all come together knowing that we have the goal of improving our photography!
Please share your tips, ideas, inspiration, and anything else that helps others improve.

Unleash Your Creative Potential

Join Us for the Free Visual Storytelling Conference Virtual Event on Saturday, June 17, 2023

Join us on June 17, 2023, for an immersive experience that will unleash your creative potential and elevate your visual storytelling skills! The Visual Storytelling Conference is going virtual after a highly-successful in-person run at NAB Show in Las Vegas. This one-of-a-kind event will bring top industry experts right to your home, sharing their tips and tricks for crafting captivating stories that leave a lasting impact.

Whether you're a photographer, vlogger, filmmaker, or simply an enthusiast of the art of storytelling, you won't want to miss this must-attend event. Learn how to connect with your audience like never before by mastering the power of stunning visuals.

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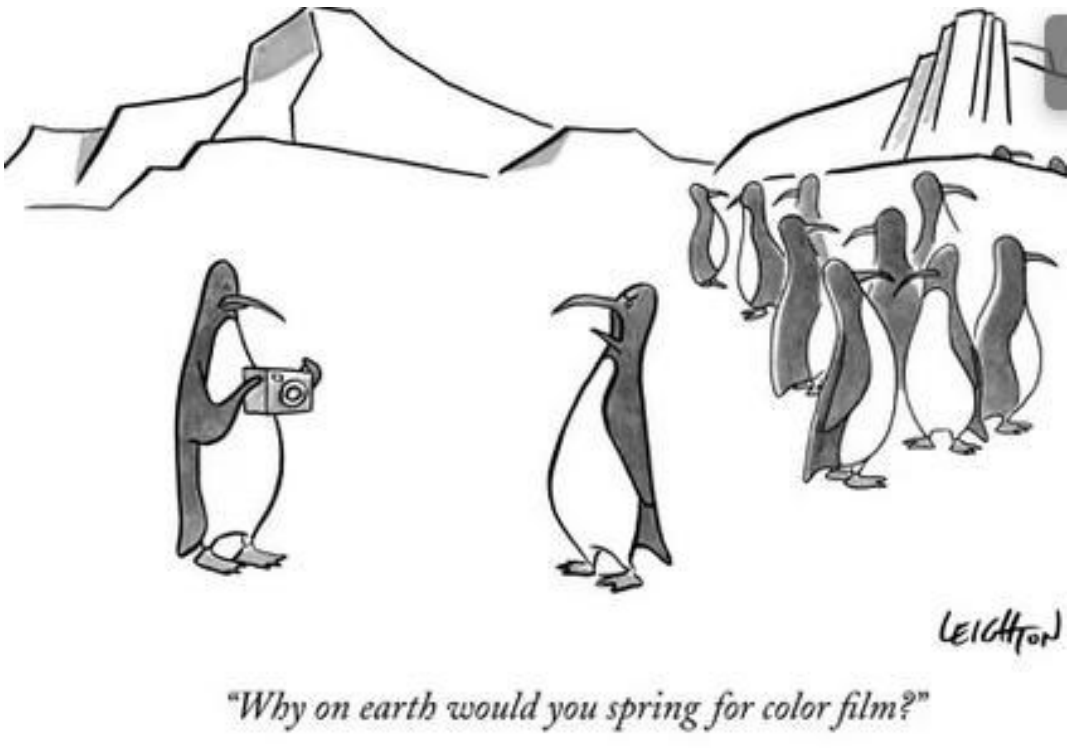

"Why on earth would you spring for color film?"

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