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Silhouette Photography

by Trisha Leung

Photography Tips

Many of you photographers have probably stared at a silhouette photo and wondered to yourself how exactly they were taken. Silhouettes could contain a couple's moment on the beach, a person staring out at a landscape, or an amazing cityscape with the sun going down in the background. Silhouette photographers must have great timing and perfect exposure settings.

Photo by Isai Ramos

What is a Silhouette?

In photography, a silhouette is defined as an outline that appears dark against a light background. More specifically, it is where your subject is seen as a black shape without detail against a brighter background. This is an artistic outcome that many photographers like to perfect. This effect can be achieved with any kind of bright light source, but of course the most commonly used is the sun around sunrise or sunset. The backlighting from the sun shadows everything towards you and produces this effect.

Silhouette Techniques

When you are getting ready to take your silhouette pictures, there are a couple things to keep in mind. These tips work for both digital and film photography. Make sure you never point the lens directly

Viewfinder cover photo taken by.

Norman Blake

at the sun. If there is too much light, the light will fall on your object. If there is not enough light, your background will become grey. The main key to silhouette lighting is having your background lighter than your object, but this can be done in more ways than one. Many photographers focus on a certain time of day, where their subject is, what kind of weather there is, and where the sun positioned in the frame.

Photo by Keisuke Higashio

My Silhouette Tips and Methods

I choose to take my silhouette photos when the sun is right above the horizon, usually at sunset. I prefer this time because the sun causes the sky to be at its brightest for a greater contrast between your object and the sky. Try aiming at your object with the sun directly behind it for a glow around your silhouette. Also, if the sky is too bright and your object is small, it is possible to underexpose your silhouetted image.
I always use a narrow aperture (high f/stop) so the camera captures the whole scene in focus. It is also convenient to use this method so you can use your camera's automatic exposure settings focused on the lighted background. If you use a point-and-shoot camera focused on the subject meant to be dark, the camera will probably try to compensate for the lack of light on the subject and overexpose the background. So, when you have your camera set on automatic exposure, be sure to focus on the light in the background.
Remember that there isn't an exact science to taking a great silhouette. It takes practice, experimentation, and maybe even a little luck to capture a truly spectacular silhouette photo

How to Shoot Black and White Street Photography

By Dylan Siragusano

Intro

Taking black and white photography can be an artistic choice of the street photographer. It gives the photo a timeless character that recalls the very essence of humanist photography. There are its big names such as Henri Cartier Bresson, Robert Doisneau, Joseph Koudelka. etc. Initially, photography, for technical reasons, could only be done in black and white. It was not until the 1935s that the first color films, including the famous Kodachrome, appeared and replaced black and white movies. However, some nostalgic people for monochrome still mainly use black and white (this is the case of Sebastião Salgado, for example) because color can be distractive, especially when conveying messages. The black and white photo allows you to focus on the essential; it resonates with something archaic in us. It is also more easily harmonious, which should be more than a recommended passage for beginners in street photography who wish to develop their capacity in terms of composition, light, and contrasts. In this article, I will introduce you to the elements to consider to start black and white street photography and better understand it to use it more often. Those who already have notions of photography will find keys that will allow them to improve their photographic gaze.

Set your camera properly

To get off to a good start in taking a photo, you must have taken the time to adjust your camera to be ready properly. Especially since street photography does not forgive poor preparation, some scenes are played in a fraction of a second and do not leave room for approximation in terms of settings. I could advise you to understand better black and white is to use it as soon as you shoot. Many modern mirrorless cameras offer direct shots and live views in black and white. It makes it possible to compose the photograph while having in front of our eyes a result close to the one you will obtain at the end (excluding post-process adjustments).

For my part, my choice of camera went to Fujifilm, which presents the advantage of having black and white film simulations that emulate black and white film stocks. I am very fond of this type of simulation. However, I shoot in JPEG + RAW. It allows me to save a raw copy of my photos on a second SD card if I want more editing latitude than the jpeg file. I know other brands like Sony, Olympus, Ricoh, Leica. etc., have similar modes that I invite you to use if you focus on street photography. Another advantage of shooting in Raw + jpeg: you can recover the colors of the raw file in post-processing if you ever change your mind.

Some cameras also offer to make some image adjustments before taking the photo: correction of contrast, white balance, clarity, etc. Do some tests; the goal is to bring out all the shades of grey, pure black, and pure white in your photos. Some black and white images lack contrast; they appear “flat,” greyish. An excellent black and white photo is a photo that contains information in a wide range of shades of grey and therefore contrasts.

It might seem silly to change the colors of a black and white photo, but if you can, I recommend that you take the time to adjust them before you shoot. The white color balance settings on your camera will impact the final rendering of black and white. In the same way, you can put a color filter on your lens (yellow, red, blue, green) to lighten or darken specific colors. It depends on the type of photography you want to do, and some cameras allow you to simulate the effect of these filters digitally.

I use a yellow filter most of the time because it helps brighten faces when photographing people in the street. It is a filter that is also used in black and white portraiture. Do a few tests to find the style that suits you the most; I advise you to put the live histogram so that the shadows are not blocked, the highlights are not burned, and the photo is harmonious.

Focus on composition and subject

A good photo is undoubtedly a photo with a balanced composition and a fascinating subject that resonates with an emotional component in the viewer. Black and white simplify the composition because it puts aside the question of color. The more saturated a photograph is in color, the more difficult it is to harmonize the colors. It is the advantage of black and white which “smooths” this composition in shades of grey. To master black and white, I already suggest that you concentrate for a given time only on it and abandon color. I have often advised aspiring street photographers to focus on one element to improve the art of composition. So, for example, six months, only do black and white photography. Even better, only do it with only one lens (a fixed focal length) so that your photos are consistent. This way will allow you also to master the focal length.
One of the essential things in a black and white photo is minimalism. You have to simplify the scene because overlays work pretty poorly when highlighting a particular element. Try to focus on the background of the subject you want to photograph so that the contrasts can put it in perspective. Example: a dark matter on a light background, or vice versa, a light subject on a dark background. A plain pattern on a complex background…etc. To bring out your subject, you can, of course, open your diaphragm as wide as possible to have a reduced depth of field and blur the background information. Finally, you can use a flash that will illuminate the subject and darken the background with the correct settings for more courage. This technique is widely used in black and white street photography.
The most straightforward compositions are often the ones that have the most impact. Black and white photography has a deep emotional component that vibrates the nostalgic cord of the viewer. Photographing hands is an excellent technique to bring out this aspect of someone’s personality. Social and humanistic subjects work particularly well in black and white.

Focus on light and textures

Black and white photography allows you to focus on the very essence of the photo: light. Hunt for contrasts in a scene. I often use one technique to play around with the exposure composition dial when working around a scene. The results can be drastically different depending on whether you have high keys (+1, +2 on exposure compensation) or low keys (-1, -2) composition. For my part, I prefer to underexpose my black and white photos so that the blacks are deeper and the highlights are preserved. Thus, the images appear more contrasted; it works particularly well with so-called “dramatic” light scenes. If I had to provide you with straightforward advice for determining if a light is dramatic enough, look at the size of your offset shadow on the floor. If it’s bigger than you are, the light is good.
What I love most about black and white photography because it brings out the textures of a surface much better than color photography. It gives the black and white photo an almost tactile feel which can be very pleasing to the viewer. This questions past kinaesthetic sensations and gives photography another perspective. Search for these textures: old fabric, skin with many wrinkles, a wall that has stood the test of time, etc. This element is the icing on the cake, which can even be included as the main element of your photography if you are more on the abstract photography side.

How to post process black and white photos

Black and white photography is comfortable in terms of post-processing. You don't need to be a colorimetry professional and know the science of colors to get a good result. I regret when I shoot in color, it is often necessary to abandon the composition to concentrate on the harmony of the colors. It can be particularly time-consuming for results which can be disappointing. The many parameters of a scene require us to modify our way of editing the colors constantly.
Black and white photography allows you to get to the point and have more consistent results, which is interesting if you are working on a series of photographs (a photographic essay, for example) that requires a certain regularity. All post-process software is suitable for editing a black and white picture (lightroom, capture one, Luminar, photoshop. Etc.). For my part, I mainly use Capture one. However, I have experienced great joy in using Silver Efex Pro for the past few months, which is intended for editing black and white photography. I find that the photos edited with this software have more depth. It has tools that are very useful for the photographer. It is not necessarily valuable to retouch a black and white photograph. Still, at the expense of film photography, photographers used methods to more or less expose certain parts of the photo so that elements were more or less highlighted. This is not a modern technique, even if modern tools have brought it up. When you return home, I advise you first to check whether the photograph's exposure is suitable for you. I like to play a bit on the tone curve to add more or less contrast. Check the exposure curve to see if the photograph has information on the full dynamic range and deep blacks and immaculate whites (in a very minimal part, unless specifically desired artistic effect). If not, adjust the levels. To verify this, Silver Efex Pro has a tool that allows you to highlight the different shades of gray directly on the photo. If one of the shades were missing, it suffices to modify a few settings until it appears. The photographs, therefore, have a wider tonal range which is more prosperous and thus more pleasant to watch, in my opinion.
Finally, I like to add locally on the parts that interest me a little clarity to bring out the textures (faces, hands, rough objects, etc.). I use for this correction masks on the affected places. You can also do this by using the brush in the lightroom.

Conclusion

As you will have understood, black and white photography makes it possible to have a more direct, less complex relationship with the photographic object: the scene, the subject, its history, as well as the emotional component. It allows for more consistency in our work, is less time-consuming, and is timeless. In

addition to this, you printed black and white photographs age better over time than color photographs. These are all reasons that should allow you to use it more often. So now, you know what you have to do!

In-camera shooting aids for low light photography

Article by Margaret Brown

How in-camera pre-sets can assist with low-light shooting

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Dedicated low-light shooting modes enable photographers to use very slow shutter speeds to minimise the chances of introducing blurring due to camera shake.

Almost since the first point-and-shoot digicams were invented, camera manufacturers have come to the aid of novice photographers by providing pre-set exposure modes to help them select appropriate aperture, shutter speed and ISO settings for popular photographic genres. The first of the 'Scene' pre-sets were for portrait, landscape and sports photography. But it wasn't long before night portrait and night landscape pre-sets were added and it's not uncommon for modern cameras to provide separate pre-sets covering fireworks, candlelight, sunset and dusk and/or dawn.

But it hasn't stopped there. Since camera manufacturers figured out they could 'stack' multiple exposures with in-camera processing we've seen Handheld Twilight, HDR (high dynamic range) and Anti Motion Blur modes, each of which uses multi-frame recording to create a single image with less noise, an expanded dynamic range or reduced motion blurring.

Scene Pre-sets

Scene pre-sets come in handy when you have a momentary 'can't cope' situation where you're not sure what aperture, shutter speed and/or ISO settings to use and you need to work quickly. Selecting the right one takes a second, while it may take a minute or more for you to determine the best exposure settings and configure the camera accordingly.

Like all camera controls, pre-sets involve different combinations of the three key exposure controls: aperture, shutter speed and ISO sensitivity. The secret behind their success is being able to balance all three to achieve the optimal brightness and contrast levels, adequate depth of field and minimal image noise.

The main pre-sets used for low light photography are the night portrait, night landscape, fireworks, museum, candlelight, indoor/party, sunset and dusk/dawn modes. The following summaries provide details on the situations they are designed to address and how they configure the camera.

1. Night Portrait

This mode is for taking portrait shots after sundown, where a natural-looking balance between subject and background detail is required. In most cameras it will pop up and switch on the flash and activate face detection. A slow shutter speed will be selected so use of a tripod (or other form of stabilisation) is recommended for this mode. Sensitivity is adjusted to optimise noise levels. Red-eye reduction processing is engaged if the camera supports it.

The Night Portrait mode combines balanced flash with ambient lighting and usually includes face detection.

2. Night Landscape

This mode is for taking photographs at night where both close and distant detail must be captured and natural colours are required. It can be used for subjects other than landscapes, including cityscapes and interiors of buildings. The camera's flash is switched off and low ISO settings are prioritised. A slow shutter speed is selected and the daylight white balance setting is selected. Use of a tripod is highly recommended as exposures may run to several seconds.

The night landscape mode uses a slow shutter speed and sets the focus to record a wide depth of sharpness. It can be used for cityscapes but moving subjects will appear blurred. Ideally, the camera should be tripod mounted.

3. Fireworks

The purpose of this mode is self-explanatory and, like the Night Landscape mode, it relies on having the flash switched off. The lens focus is set to infinity and a slow shutter speed is selected. ISO settings depend on ambient light levels. Mounting the camera on a tripod (or some other form of stabilization) is essential as exposures may be several seconds long.

The fireworks mode suppresses the flash and combines a slow shutter speed with focusing the lens on infinity.

4. Museum

Although not strictly a low light mode, the Museum pre-set is designed for indoor photography where use of flash is prohibited. In some cameras it also disables camera beeps, enabling shots to be taken silently and unobtrusively. To cope with hand-held shooting, a high ISO setting is usually selected, along with a relatively fast shutter speed. The continuous shooting mode may be engaged to minimize the risk of camera shake.

The museum mode is designed for indoor photography where you can't use flash.

5. Candlelight

This mode is designed for indoor portraits in dim artificial lighting where warm colours are desirable. As well as switching the flash off and activating face detection, it will select a high ISO value and daylight white balance.

Some cameras add slight overall softening to create a more aesthetic effect.

A typical application for the candlelight mode, which set the camera's ISO to 400 and selected a shutter speed of /130 second at f/4 for the 40mm lens used for the shot.

6. Indoor/Party

The Indoor or Party mode is designed for taking photographs (mainly of people) with a hand-held camera in a dimly-lit room, usually under artificial lighting. The shutter speed is usually set to the slowest speed at which the average photographer can keep the camera steady for the selected focal length. The ISO and aperture are adjusted for the room brightness. If the flash is used, its output will be balanced to match the ambient lighting, ensuring a natural-looking result is obtained.

The indoor/party mode is designed for taking photographs with a hand-held camera in a dimly-lit room.

7. Sunset

This mode is all about preserving and enhancing the warm tone in sunset shots. It will The camera will switch off the flash, set the focus to infinity and set a daylight colour balance, which will probably be biased towards red to achieve the main objective. ISO settings will generally be selected from the lower end of the available range.

The sunset mode may boost reds and yellows to emphasise the warm tones in sunset shots.

8. Dusk/Dawn

These settings have been designed to preserve a natural colour balance in pre-dawn and twilight shots. The ISO will be set as low as possible for a shutter speed at which the average used can hand-hold the camera. The focus may be set to infinity. Color saturation may be increased and a magenta filter may be added.

The dusk/dawn pre-set aims to preserve natural-looking colours in pre-dawn and twilight shots and may add a weak magenta filter to correct a greenish bias in the light.

9. Handheld Twilight

This mode was introduced by Sony in about 2010, initially in Cyber-shot digi-cams, although it later became more widespread. The camera captures six frames in rapid succession in less than a second, using very short exposures to minimise blurring. These exposures are combined in the camera to produce an image using noise-reduction processing to minimise noise in low-light shots. The flash is disabled and you can't adjust most camera settings. You can hear the shutter firing multiple times. For night and low-light shooting, this mode can deliver images with less noise and a better exposure balance than similar shots taken with a single exposure.

The Handheld Twilight mode records a series of frames with short exposures to minimise blurring and combines them to produce a single image. For night and low-light shooting, this mode can deliver images with less noise and a better exposure balance than similar shots taken with a single exposure.

10. Anti Motion Blur

This mode appeared at the same time as the Hand-held Twilight mode and uses a similar exposure method: six frames are captured in less than a second and combined to make a single image. In this case, priority is given to image sharpness by overcoming blur due to movement in low light.

Image Stacking

Image stacking involves two processes: capturing a number of photographs of a subject without altering the camera's position or the lens adjustment and combining them into a single image. Astronomers often use it for recording images of the night sky when the camera is attached to a tracking tripod. Photographers use it for capturing star trails.

The process is relatively simple. Set up the camera on a sturdy tripod, pointing at the sky (or the subject you want to record). Then use the time-lapse function to record a sequence of, say, one-second exposures at intervals of between 10 seconds and a minute. Longer intervals will produce gaps in the trails, resulting in a 'dotted' effect.

Keep on recording for a long time; ideally at least 30 minutes. In general, the more photos you take, the more detail you can pick out and the more uniform the background noise becomes after averaging.

An example of the use of image stacking in Photoshop CC. Seventy-eight frames recorded with the time-lapse mode on a Panasonic GH4 camera over a 35 minute period have been combined to produce this image.

Users of Photoshop CC can combine their images via the Statistics function (File > Scripts > Statistics), which provides an interface for selecting and loading up the images to be combined. Select the Maximum setting from the Choose Stack Mode drop-down list to choose the brightest pixel at every point of the blend.

The stacked files appear as a Smart Object in the Layers panel in Photoshop CC. To combine them into an editable file, click on the Layer tab in the top menu and select Flatten Image.

The latest Olympus OM-D cameras include a Live Composite shooting mode, which is designed for cap-

turing shots of star trails and uses image stacking to combine multiple relatively short exposures into a single image that extends over a long period of time. Total recording time can be up to three hours.
The camera captures a single initial exposure to record the brightness levels in the scene, and these are used to determine the subsequent exposures. Photographers can select the ISO sensitivity, lens aperture and shutter speed settings before pressing the shutter button again to initiate the exposure.
Each frame is exposed for the pre-set duration and the camera will continue to record frames, displaying the results on the monitor screen. When the end result is as you want it, pressing the shutter button stops the recording process and the camera will combine all the frames to create a composite image.
This mode can be used for JPEGs or ORF.RAW files or a combination of both. As well as shooting star trails, it can also be handy for capturing shots of fireworks and light trails, attractively blurred shots of flowing water and blurring moving subjects against a static cityscape.

Understanding Focusing in Photography

Everything you need to know about camera focusing

By Spencer Cox

One important technique to understand in photography, especially when you're starting out, is the concept of *focus*. If you don't focus properly, you will end up with blurry photos even when all your other camera settings are correct. Focusing can be easy or difficult depending on your subject, like a non-moving landscape versus a fast-moving bird in flight. This guide covers everything you need to know in order to focus properly and capture sharp images.

What is Focus?

In every photo you take, there will be a plane of focus. This is the region in space with the potential to be as sharp as possible in a photo.
Some people find it useful to think of the plane of focus like a window intersecting with the scene you're photographing. Any object in your photo that touches this window is said to be "in focus." When you move the plane forward and backward to achieve your intended image, usually with your subject at maximum sharpness, that's called *focusing*.
With modern equipment, focusing typically takes place within your lens, which has glass elements inside that can move forward and backward to change the optical path of light. Along the same lines, if you physically move your lens farther from the camera, you'll change where the plane of focus is positioned. (This is how extension tubes work for macro photography.)
Focusing happens either automatically or manually. Automatic focus, or autofocus, is when the camera system drives a motor to move elements in your lens to change focus. To focus manually, you need to turn a ring or similar mechanism on the lens instead.

Manual Focus vs Autofocus

In the early days of photography, every single lens was manual focus only (and many lenses today are the same way). Autofocus is a comparatively new invention in the history of photography, first appearing on the market in 1977. Still, it's an important one.
Autofocus systems use a motor in the camera or lens to focus on a subject you've selected manually or automatically. So, just press a button on your camera, and it will focus on your chosen subject – or choose one for you if you prefer. Pretty useful.
Most photographers use autofocus more often than manual focus. The main reason is simply convenience; it's easier than focusing manually. Autofocus also tends to be faster, and, in many cases, it's also more accurate (such as tracking focus on a moving subject). This is why sports and wildlife photographers tend to rely on autofocus so heavily.
Still, manual focus stuck around for a reason. If your camera is having trouble focusing, such as in dark conditions, manual focus lets you override any issues, or make precise adjustments that the camera may have missed. And if you set your lens to manual focus, you can lock focus for a series of photos in a row.
Although most photographers use autofocus more than manual focus, it's a good idea to be familiar with both.

Can You Autofocus with Your Camera Equipment?

In order to use autofocus, at least your camera or your lens must have an autofocus motor. That seems simple enough – but "autofocus" lenses don't always have a built-in motor, and neither does every camera on the market! Specifically, if you shoot with the Nikon D3500 or D5600 (or an older model in the same lineup), pay attention to your lens purchases. You'll want one that is designated AF-S or AF-P if you need autofocus; avoid AF-D.

Phase Detection vs Contrast Detection

How does autofocus work at a technical level? You don't need to know the science behind it unless you're interested, but you still should be familiar with the two main types of autofocus systems today: phase detection and contrast detection. Each one has its own strengths and weaknesses:

Phase detection is very fast and good at tracking moving subjects, since it doesn't require much computational work from your camera. However, it is also more prone to errors and internal misalignment issues. Some cameras let you calibrate your phase detection system to minimize errors. (See our detailed explanation of how phase detection autofocus works.)

Contrast detection requires your camera to process more data, which means it generally takes longer to lock focus. As a result, it isn't good at tracking moving subjects. However, contrast detection does tend to be more precise, since the autofocus system is directly measuring the data from your camera sensor. This is good when your subject isn't moving as fast, like landscape photography.

That's all good to know, but how do you actually set one or the other for a given photo?

It's actually quite easy. On most DSLR cameras, phase detection occurs any time you autofocus via the viewfinder. Contrast detection occurs any time you autofocus via the rear LCD screen. So, just use viewfinder or live view accordingly. (Most mirrorless cameras only have one system, usually a hybrid, so you can't switch between them; see DSLR vs mirrorless.)

Keep in mind that there is always an "ideal plane of focus" in a photo – usually, intersecting with your main subject. Both phase detection and contrast detection can get you there. It's just that phase detection tends to do it more quickly and with better tracking, while contrast detection may do it with more accuracy for non-moving subjects.

Continuous vs Single-Servo Autofocus

Another important decision you must make when using autofocus is to pick your *focusing mode*. The two most important and common options are continuous-servo and single-servo autofocus:

- Continuous-servo is also known as AI Servo (Canon) and AF-C (Nikon). Essentially, it means that your camera continuously adjusts focus whenever you hold down the focusing button. This is ideal when you are photographing a moving subject and trying to track its position.

Single-servo is also known as One-Shot (Canon) and AF-S (Nikon). In this case, once your camera acquires focus, it doesn't readjust until you let go of the focusing button and try again. This is ideal when your subject and camera are completely still, and there is no need to keep adjusting from moment to moment for proper focus.

Some cameras have a third mode – Auto-Servo Autofocus – that analyses the scene and automatically picks between these two options. Even if your camera does have this, though, it's still important to know what each one does, since it's always possible that the automatic selection will make a mistake.

If you're using autofocus, we recommend single-servo for typical landscape and architectural photography, and continuous-servo for most other images, such as wildlife or sports.

Autofocus Area Modes

A major part of focusing is choosing the right *autofocus area mode*. This is where you tell your camera which sort of focusing strategy you want to apply, so that it can make the best decisions on how to track and follow focus on your subject.

We already have an in-depth guide to autofocus modes that covers all this in detail, so check it out if you want a more information on this topic. However, the important thing is that your autofocus system is made up of focusing points, which correspond to regions that your camera can focus on.

Usually, a greater number of focusing points is better. So is a larger spread (overall coverage area). It's easier to track a moving subject when your camera has several focusing points covering a large portion of the image. However, you still need to tell your camera *how to use those points*, or it won't be particularly helpful. This is where autofocus area modes come into play:

- Single-Point autofocus: The camera uses one focusing point to autofocus – the focusing point you've selected. This is good when your camera and subject aren't moving, and you don't need any tracking capabilities. It *can* work with continuous autofocus, but it doesn't track fast-moving objects across multiple points.
- Dynamic autofocus: You select a single focusing point for the camera to use. In this case, though, it can track your subject if it moves into some of the surrounding points (you usually can specify how many the camera pays attention to). This area mode is good for wildlife photography.
- 3D Tracking autofocus: The camera follows your subject as it moves across focusing points. Unlike the standard Dynamic AF-Area mode, you aren't expected to pan your camera around to keep your subject as close as possible to the original point you selected. This is also good for wildlife photography, although it's not always as quick or accurate as the simpler Dynamic AF-Area mode.
- Group-Area autofocus: The camera uses multiple autofocus points simultaneously, usually five. It gives all of them equal priority, and focuses on the nearest object located on any of the five points. This is useful for tricky autofocus situations, such as a fast-moving bird in flight.

Auto-Area autofocus is when your camera automatically scans the scene and decides on your subject (often the closest object to your camera, or a face). We don't recommend this mode, since it gives you less control.

Not all cameras have every one of these options, and some may have additional area modes as well, especially for video autofocus. The specific names may also be different depending on your individual camera – but this is the general structure of the options you'll see.

You'll learn quickly which area modes you like, and how to get the greatest number of keepers in certain situations. However, fully mastering these modes takes plenty of time and practice, and it isn't the sort of thing you can learn overnight.

The AF-On Button

By default, most cameras will autofocus when you half-press the shutter button. Although this is a nice feature, there are times when you will want the two actions – focusing, and taking a photo – to be separate from one another. Most cameras let you do this by assigning focus to a different button, often called AF-On, and removing it from the shutter release button. This is also called "back button focusing."

AF-On is exactly like half-pressing the shutter release, but it's just in a different location. That might not sound like a big deal, but there are plenty of situations where you won't want the camera to refocus when you press the shutter release, so AF-On is a crucial feature. We recommend that you use it instead of the shutter button if at all possible. There are practically no negatives, and several potential positives.

So, when does AF-On help a photo?

1. If you want to lock focus across several photos. You simply press the AF-On button to focus, and then don't press it again until you've captured your desired set of photos. This is quicker than switching your lens to manual focus every time you want to lock things down for a series of images.

If you want to focus and recompose. Let's say that you want a composition where your subject is at the extreme edge of the photo. In that case, it's unlikely that your autofocus points will reach far enough. So, just focus using one of your existing points, then reposition the composition how you want. This is much more natural with the AF-On button – which you can let go of after you've focused – compared to half-pressing the shutter button the entire time. (Read more about focus-recompose.)

If you need to wait a bit before capturing the photo. You might find yourself in situations where you need to focus, and then wait some amount of time before capturing the photo. For example, maybe you're photographing a fox den, and you're waiting for the fox to peek out its head. With the AF-On button, you can focus at the right spot and wait, then take the photo as quickly as possible when the right moment arrives – while still being prepared to refocus quickly if necessary.

These reasons, among others, are why we strongly recommend switching your camera from shutter-release focus to AF-On focus. If you've always used the shutter button to autofocus, it might be a bit awkward for the first few days after you switch, but it is something you won't regret in the end. (Some cameras don't have an AF-On button, but you'll almost always be able to customize one of the buttons for the same purpose.)

Where to Focus

Most of the time, you should simply focus on your main subject. Typically, if you're photographing a person, focus on one of their eyes. The same goes for wildlife photography, event photography, and so on. However, sometimes, you'll have a bit of artistic freedom when you focus. Say that you're photographing a flower. Should you focus on the nearest petal, or on the colourful centre? Neither option is wrong. It comes down to the effect you want to convey in an image.
The sharpest objects in your photo stand out. You can use this to your advantage. If you want, you can focus somewhere unexpected to draw attention to a specific part of your photo. For example, take a "portrait" photo where you focus on the person's hands rather than their eyes, even if their face is visible in your photo. There are no unbreakable rules for where you should focus. It's a creative, artistic decision.

Focus Stacking

One technique you might hear about from time to time is called focus stacking. With this method, you take several photos *focused at different points*, and then you combine the sharpest bits of every photo together. In a perfect world, the resulting image will be completely sharp everywhere you want.
Focus stacking can be useful, especially for macro photography and landscape photography, where it can be hard to get a sharp enough photo from front to back with any other method. However, it also has some issues.
If anything in your photo is moving, proper focus stacking can be almost impossible. Even in a best-case scenario, it still takes extra time in the field and in post-processing. But it sometimes will be the only way to capture enough depth of field in a photo, so keep it in mind for a rainy day.
You can read more about focus stacking here, although keep in mind that it's a specialized technique (and relatively easy to mess up). Don't use it unless there is no other way to capture the photo you want.

Conclusion

Focusing is a deep topic in photography that is very important to understand. When your photos are properly focused, they will be sharp and detailed, with a sense of intent and skill behind them. This applies to every type of photography, from sports to landscapes. It's best to learn things the right way as early as possible so that you don't fall into bad habits along the way.

Club News Extra

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"Grandpa, if you give me 1 dollar, I'll tell you who sleeps with Grandma when you're not home..."
"Here, I'll give you 2 dollars, who is it?
"Me...!"

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