# 8 Common Photography Mistakes You Want to Avoid

## How do we perceive pictures?

Before we begin, let me ask you - ever notice how you look at a picture?  Usually, when we first look at a picture, our eyes are drawn to a particular point.  Our gaze will move around that point, clockwise or counter-clockwise, until we take in the entire picture.  With some pictures (usually landscapes), we look at the entire picture at once, as you would an actual landscape.  With some, you focus on a point and then "zoom out," just like a camera would (close-up shots of flowers, insects, etc.).  Finally, at times, you look only at the main subject and your gaze cuts out the rest (as in head-to-toe shots of people).

When our perception doesn't follow any of these patterns, we *feel* like it's a bad picture.  Our brain wants to perceive things in a certain way.  When something falls outside of the boundaries of this perception preset, we can't comprehend it, and so we call it "bad."  Once you understand this concept, you will be able to see half of your own mistakes!  These tips are common to both film and digital photography.

# Common Photography Mistakes

## #1  COMPOSITION

The composition of a good photograph lies in the content of the picture as well as the proportion of three main components of a picture – the foreground, the subject, and the background.  It is important that the subject occupy a larger portion of the picture than the other two components (but there may be times when breaking the rules that may create an even more striking picture).  The foreground should be minimal.  The background should either be plain or out of focus so that the focus of the viewer is drawn to the subject.  There is no mathematical value to "how much" of the picture should be occupied by the subject.  While making pictures in which you'd like to highlight the background, try experimenting with the position of the subject in the picture.  The subject doesn't always need to be in the center.  In fact, in most cases, it is better for the subject not to always be centered.

## #2  LEVEL OF CAMERA

The level of the camera should be at the level of the subject – NOT at your eye level!  While clicking a puppy, get down on your knees.  While clicking a flower, get closer to the flower.  If you're photographing someone who is tall, stand on a platform.  Unless creatively intentional, changing the angle between the subject and the camera is going to make the picture look weird.  Oddly out of proportion.  A short person may appear towering if photographed from a slightly lower level than the subject's face.  This would also make a slim person look larger.

Sometimes, however, the effect produced by playing around with the angle at which you're making a picture can add to the aesthetic value.

*Photo by Davide Ragusa provided by Unsplash.com.*
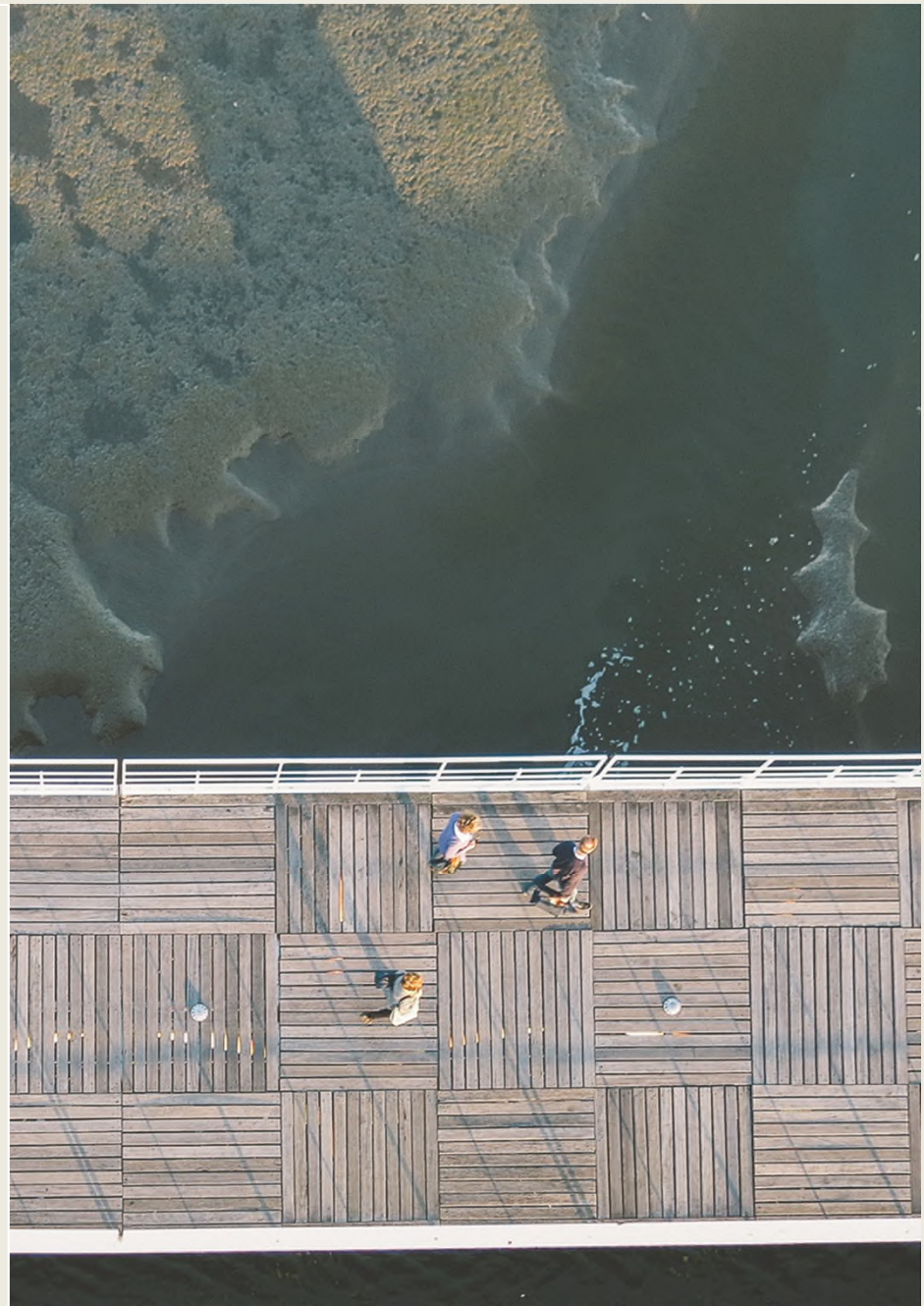
## #3  USING FLASH

Try to photograph in natural light, when possible, especially when you're first starting out on your photographic journey.  Actually, the best time to photograph outdoors is about 1-2 hours after sunrise, and in the 1-2 hours before sunset.  Photographers know this as "The Golden Hour."  Why?  The light during these times of day is uniform.  It's low in the sky, even and warm.  Rest assured, if you photograph during these times, your pictures will turn out beautifully.  And you're really going to love those times when you can play with the rising or setting sun to create some magical effects.  For photographing at night indoors, turn on as many lights as possible so that your room is adequately and uniformly lit.  If that's not possible, play around with the exposure time for better results, but avoid using the flash, if you can.  Why avoid flash, when there are those handy built-in flashes on nearly every camera, right?  Simply put, flash lights up only the part of the picture that it's pointed at, making an already dark background appear darker, and throwing harsh, unattractive light on your subject, and  some unappealing shadows on your background.  That's probably not going to be your goal, right?  There's plenty of time to play with flash later.

## #4  BLACK AND WHITE

The tips and tricks of black and white photography are far different from those of color photography.  But one general rule applies:  landscapes look unflattering in black and white, but portraits and macros (close-ups) can look awesome. Just because you like black and white photography, doesn't mean every picture taken in black and white is going to look good.  Same for sepia toned photographs. Architecture pictures look beautiful in sepia, but portraits aren't so pretty.  Early photography was black and white by default, but over time it has transformed into an aesthetic technique rather than existing by necessity.  It will take more experimenting to understand how it works.  Give it some time and have fun with it.

# Common Misconceptions about Photography

# #1 A GOOD PHOTO CALLS FOR AN EXPENSIVE CAMERA

*"The best camera is the one you have with you."*
                                                                *- Ansel Adams*

Even an ordinary 3.1 megapixel camera can be used to photograph a good picture. You need not necessarily have a digital SLR camera for that. Forget this myth as soon as you can. Yes, a good camera will give you good picture quality, but just because the market now offers 12 megapixel cameras doesn't mean your 3.1 megapixel camera has lost its capacity to photograph good pictures.



*Photo by Jake Melara provided by Unsplash.com.*

## #2  Only a professional can make good pictures

WRONG!  I have seen pictures of amateur photographers that would put some professionals to shame.  There's no doubt that having formal knowledge about photography helps you make good pictures, but not everyone want to be a professional photographer, right?  Some people just want to be able to make pictures of their children that reflect their personalities or capture beautiful photos of family travels and events.  You do not need to be a professional for such occasions.

*Photo by Sergei Zolkin provided by Unsplash.com.*

## #3  Photography is Not a DIY Kind of Thing

FALSE!  Many photographers are self-taught.  There are so many resources out there today to help you learn photography – use them all.  Whether you eventually want to become a professional photographer or you just want to improve your family pictures, there are books, websites, courses, workshops...you name it. Nothing, however, beats going out there and shooting.  If photography is something you really want to do, you can do it yourself.  It is far from impossible.  You just need to do it.  Take that step.  Take it from the self-proclaimed Research Queen.

*Photo by Caleb Ekeroth provided by Unsplash.com.*

## #4  There's Always Photoshop

Yes.  You're right.  There *is* always Photoshop when you need to enhance or correct a bad photograph.  But why make a bad picture to begin with, and have to spend hours doing tedious post-production?  Using Photoshop creatively is very different from using it to correct errors in exposure or composition, or to hide inadequacies.  Develop your skills with your camera before you try to tackle Photoshop.  Like many things that make our lives easier, Photoshop can be addictive and can also be overdone.  It's always best to get a picture right the first time – in your camera.  Use Photoshop later for creative touches.

*Photo by Lokigrl616 courtesy of Free Range Stock (www.freerangestock.com).*

> *"You don't make a photograph just with a camera. You bring to the act of photography all the pictures you have seen, the books you have read, the music you have heard, the people you have loved."*
>
> *~ Ansel Adams*

As I've said, photography is an art.  There are so many places to go with it.  So don't learn it entirely by the book.  Don't limit yourself.  Experiment.  Play with it.  Explore it.  Find inspiration anywhere and everywhere.  Find instruction when you feel like you need it.

I've shared here some of the most common mistakes made today, but don't get bogged down by "rules."  Rules are made to be broken, right? Well, that is *especially* true in photography.  So once you've learned the rules, play around with breaking them and see what you can create.  But most of all have fun with it!

*Lisa*

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