

# Assignment

## City Lights

### The City - and Night Pictures

Night photos can be some of the most dramatic photographs that you'll ever shoot. City lights can create a beautiful look, with the correct aperture setting. Shooting photos of fireworks is fun, but needs a long shutter opening. Capturing photos of your friends during a nighttime party requires a good flash unit. Shooting those night photos can be a challenge, but having the right equipment and knowing the correct techniques certainly helps. Try these tips to improve your night photography results.

Cities are not only home to many people's homes, businesses and offices but they also full of energy, power and vitality. There are many things that make a city great and capturing the true essence of a city in one single photograph is a very hard thing to do.

The main thing that encapsulates and defines a city can actually differ depending on the time of the day and even the season. During the morning cities can look peaceful and calm, whilst during the evening or nighttime they can come alive with activity and purpose.

Most of the people that call a particular city home don't take the time to stop and marvel at the magnificent landmarks and sights that make their own home city such a wonderful place to be a part of. A really good city photograph not only shows off the majestic buildings in the heart of the city centre, but should also showcase some of the more enthralling aspects and delights that day to day city life has to offer.

- 1. Choose an Interesting Subject** - Make sure you have an interesting subject for the photo, either in the middle section of the photo or in the foreground.
- 2. Have a Mix of Foreground & Background** - Ensure that you have a good mix of interesting foreground and background areas in the entire photo.
- 3. Leave Room to Crop** - When you are framing up the photo in the viewfinder make sure that there is some room around the edge of the photo to crop the final image.
- 4. Use a Level Tripod** - Before taking the photo make sure that you use a level tripod so that the horizon is straight. Even though you can fix this up later in photoshop it is easier to do it right in the first place to save yourself the hassle.
- 5. Keep the Sun Behind You** - Try and keep the sun behind you so that you get the most amount of light on your the city and the sky has a brilliant blue look to it.
- 6. Choose the Right Time of Day** - Try to take photos as early or as late as possible in the day, as these times generally give the best light and produce more shadows and detail on your photos.
- 7. Use the Correct Exposure** - When setting the exposure for a photo make your reading based on the brightest part of the photo so that there is no overexposure.

**8. Use a Timer or Remote** - Always use a timer or remote control to take the photo so that there is not any camera shake caused by you when you depress the photo button.

**9. Use a Polarizing Filter** - On your SLR camera use a polarizing filter to remove the light reflections that bounce off building windows and metal objects.

**10. Buy in a Good Lens** - In order to get the best from your SLR camera invest in a good quality lens. They may be expensive but it will be well worth the money.

By using all of the above tips you are sure to see a noticeable improvement in any photos that you take of city buildings or skylines. Not only will your city photos be clearer and more well defined, but they will also have a wide spectrum of colour, which is the sign of a great photo.

Getting to grips with exposure is an issue for many of us. By grasping a few simple principles you are on your way to great images. A great image needs perfect exposure and so in order to get that perfect exposure you need to take note of just three factors.

Get this part understood and you'll be able to shoot great images every time.

## **1. Aperture**

It can initially seem odd that small aperture numbers mean large aperture sizes! Let's simplify it. Aperture determines the quantity of light that you allow to reach the sensor or film. Liken it to a tap. Open the tap wide open and a large quantity of water comes out. Open it up just a little and a small quantity comes out. So when you open up your aperture wide a large amount of light hits the film or sensor. The ability to control the light is essential to achieving perfect exposure.

The size of the aperture affects the depth of field but we'll look into that elsewhere. There is another problem; too much light will cause you to overexpose your image and make it too light; too little light will underexpose it and the image will be too dark. So now you need to find a way to control how much light reaches the sensor. Let's go back to the water illustration. Equate the perfect image to a bucket of water. Too much and the water will overflow and too little will result in a half full bucket. So now you need to control the time the tap remains open. That takes us on to point two.

## **2. Shutter speed**

Voila! The answer to your problem is shutter speed. This equates to how long you allow the tap to remain open. If you leave the tap on for a long time the bucket will overflow and for too short a time won't give you a full bucket. So what do you do? You have to find the perfect time that will let in enough water to fill the bucket. By getting your timing right and allowing just the right amount of time you will get the perfect image. But wait, something is not right. There are so many shutter speeds and apertures. How do you get them all right? Let's take a look at the relationship between aperture and shutter speed.

## **3. Relationship between aperture and shutter speed**

Depending on how bright the light conditions you are photographing will determine how much light needs to reach the sensor to create a perfect exposure. If for example you have your aperture set to wide open on say, f2.8, then you are allowing in a large quantity of

light. The bucket will fill quickly so the tap can only be open for a short time, i.e. you will set a very fast shutter speed. As you close down and make it smaller so you will need to increase your shutter speed or leave the tap on for longer until your tap is just dripping. This will mean in order to get a full bucket the tap will have to be left on for a very long time.

Aperture and shutter speed affect each other. Change the one and you'll need to change the other. Each setting halves or doubles the amount of light each time you change it. By going from f4 to f8 you halve the amount of light reaching the sensor and so on as you move to the next aperture number. So if your perfect combination is f4 aperture and 1/250th of a second shutter speed then by changing your aperture by half you need to double the time to only 1/125th of a second. The nice thing about digital cameras is that they do this for you automatically.

#### 4. Exposure settings

There are two settings you need to concern yourself with. Av or aperture value or Tv which means time value. Each of these gives priority to either aperture or shutter speed. So let's say you decide for creative reasons to use Av and that you want an aperture of f2.8. How do you know what shutter speed to use? Voila! The camera chooses the shutter speed for you. The same goes for Tv or shutter priority. You choose the shutter speed and the camera automatically sets the aperture for you. Simple isn't it?

The reason why you would want to choose the aperture or shutter speed are for creative reasons. A large aperture blurs out the background and creates what we call a narrow depth of field or focus. A fast shutter speed may be necessary when you shoot action photos and want the subject sharp and not blurred by the speed.

- **Use a tripod** to make sure you don't have any problems with blurry photos from camera shake. Shooting photos at night requires a slower shutter speed, which can lead to blurry photos.
- If you don't have a tripod, you can try a few tricks for **keeping the camera steady**. First, set the camera on a steady surface, such as a table or the top of a wall and consider using the camera's self-timer or remote shutter. Second, lean your body weight against a building or door-frame, holding your elbows in tightly to your body while shooting, thereby steadying yourself. Third, if you think your shot has plenty of external light, you can manually increase the shutter speed, and, hopefully, the photo's exposure will be OK.
- **Try shooting around some water**. At night, the water will appear black, but the reflection of the lights, moon, and other bright objects off the water can create some beautiful effects.
- Bring external lighting with you. If you're trying to shoot a photo of people at night, you'll **need a powerful light or flash** to provide enough light to illuminate the subjects. Some photographers even try to use directional light, such as a powerful flashlight, to create an artistic look in the photos.
- **Try several different camera settings** with a single subject, just to ensure a properly exposed shot, especially if you're learning to shoot at night. With a point and shoot, fully automatic camera, try a few different scene modes to figure out which one will work best. Shooting at night can be easier with a camera with manual control features, though.

- **Use blurred subjects** and motion to your advantage by focusing on an object that cannot move. As people or vehicles move around the object, they will look slightly blurred in the final image, with the longer shutter speeds required most of the time at night. This type of look can be interesting and different from other photos.
- **Try a lot of angles** when shooting at night. With the night sky in the background, shooting upward can create some interesting looks, for example.

## Perspective and Scale

The world we live in is three dimensional, we see in three dimensions yet when we photograph we see only two dimensions. In order to create images that add a third dimension we need to add some perspective or depth. The big question is what is perspective and how do we add it?

Because we can't see a third dimension in our images we need to create an impression that there is depth to the photograph. This is created by the relationship between elements in the image showing the space between them and giving a sense of depth. Our brains need to discern which elements are near and which are far away. If we can do this then the sense of perspective is created and the third dimension is added. So what types of perspective can be created to give this sense of depth and scale?

### 1. Lens perspective

Your choice of lens, whether wide angle or telephoto zoom will determine the amount of perspective created in your photo. Although perspective doesn't actually change you can get the impression that it does by your choice of lens. Real depth and perspective is created by wide angle lenses with elements appearing at a greater distance from each other. Telephoto lenses compress thereby giving a more crowded feeling. So lens choice is vital to creating those images with real depth.

### 2. Lines and perspective

Parallel lines in an image fool the brain into believing that they are moving away from the viewer. Here's how it works. Imagine looking down a row of crops or a railway line that disappears into the distance. The parallel lines never meet or touch but as they disappear an impression is given that they do. This is what fools the eye and brain into believing that there is distance in the image. It is best illustrated when using a wide angle lens. Be sure though to include the focal point which is also known as the vanishing point, which is the point where the lines disappear into nothing.



"Storm over Long Island Docks" captured by David Hobcote

### 3. Diminishing perspective

Diminishing perspective of scale refers to the appearance of size that our eyes see. Take for example a row of telephone poles disappearing into the distance. Our brain tells us that they all should be the same height. But, because they are all gradually getting smaller the brain says they must be getting further apart. If you use this sense of perspective you will find it extremely effective in giving depth to your images. So when you are trying to achieve this, look for fences, trees, telephone poles and similar repeated objects to include in your photo which will help create the depth.

### 4. Scale and comparison

When trying to achieve a sense of scale, choose two elements with one having a recognisable height or size, e.g. a person or a vehicle. By placing them next to a large object such as waterfall or dam wall you get an idea of how large the wall is because you know the size of the recognisable person or object. If you know the height of the person then in relation to them the dam wall must be incredibly large.

There is another very effective way of showing perspective and this is by using a wide angle lens. The lens by itself stretches the perspective naturally and this is quite dramatically increased by including an object in the foreground. When this object which you know how large it is, is compared to something in the distance such as a building or tree, the sense of scale is increased. It reveals extreme distances and gives the image real depth. This creates a strong impression of diminishing scale or perspective.



"Silver Tides" captured by Debra Vanderlaan

Photos with depth or perspective are far more dynamic and dramatic, revealing that third dimension lacking in most images. If you are able to implement this as you learn digital photography, then you are well on the way to stunning images.



"Night Cityscape - Windsor, UK" captured by Ion Paciu

