

16 Tips for better pictures on your iPhone

1. Clean your Lens regularly! I know this sounds "so obvious" but most iPhone users seldom if ever clean their camera lenses. I carry several cue-tips that are perfect for this task. Keep them in a small zip lock bag in your purse or glove box. Such a simple tool can greatly improve image sharpness, color and clarity. Do not leave home without them!



2. Slow down and learn to see what others miss. I emphasize this in all my classes. When you learn to slow down and really take the time to "see" your photography will improve. Avoid capturing the obvious - a sure fire way of getting a boring image. Try looking at your subject from different angles. Observe the direction of the light and how it falls on the scene or object. Be mindful of tones and colors. Also pay attention to what is going on in the background and the relationship between the foreground and the background - which leads us to the next tip

3. Pay attention to the background. Learn to simplify. By simplifying your composition you will attract more viewers to your picture. Don't under-estimate the power of the background. A distracting background can ruin an otherwise acceptable photo. Working a background into a shot can be very challenging and even frustrating with using an iPhone camera. The reason is simple - too much depth of field. Unlike a convention SLR camera, the iPhone does not have a way of adjusting for depth of field. To add to the challenge, if you use the zoom feature on an iPhone you sacrifice image quality. The way to get around this is to attach a telephoto lens to the phone, However, this does not address the depth of field issue. Virtually everything in the shot, both background and foreground is going to be relatively sharp. This forces you to really pay attention to what is going on in the background. Learn to work with it. It forces you to be mindfully observant of the background. If the background is not working try a different angle or filling up the frame. On occasion I will bring a portable backdrop with me in order to simplify the background especially when photographing flowers. A portable background can be just a simple piece of foam core. Sometimes I will use fabric or even hand made paper to create my own background.



4. Avoid using the camera zoom tool. When you use the zoom tool you stretch out pixels. The greater the zoom, the greater the image degradation. As I stated earlier, the way to get around this is to buy an attachable external lens that mounts onto the iPhone body. There are many out there on the market. Momemtiens Company claims to have the best optics but shop around. If you are serious about good quality images then it pays to spend the extra money.



5. Use the screen tap feature to select focus. The tap feature is one of the big improvements that have been made with the new iPhones. This is especially useful when shooting close-up. The camera will automatically focus on the primary object in the scene, usually closer to the center of the frame unless you tell it otherwise. You can over-ride this feature by tapping on the screen over the object you want in focus. So, for instance, You are shooting a bouquet of flowers and you want a specific bloom to be sharp. By tapping the screen where the bloom appears you are signaling to the camera that that is your primary bloom and that you want it sharp. Tip: Once you move the camera it will go back to auto focus - so get ready to hit the shutter button as soon as you have dialed in the focus.

6. Adjust exposure with slider feature This is another great feature the newer iPhones have - the ability to lighten or darken the exposure. This feature is especially useful when shooting scenes that have high contrast such as landscapes. Also scenes that have high contrast light - an example might be photographing someone in open shade with bright sunlight in the background. The camera automatically will try to expose for the entire scene which may produce a portrait that is too dark. You can over-ride the camera's auto feature by tapping and sliding your finger either up or down on the screen. Up lightens the exposure, sliding down darkens the exposure. Pretty cool!

7. Try different angles - work the shot with lots of variations. This ties in with achieving good composition and taking the time to really "see" your subject - whether it be a landscape, portrait or still life. If you find something of interest don't just take one or two shots - take many. Try shooting from a low position with the camera aimed high. Or the opposite looking down from above. Subject placement is important. Avoid always placing your subject in the center of the frame. Most often your composition will improve if you place the subject off-center in the frame of view. Consider the geometry of the objects in view. Look for balance- sometimes a strong shape that is placed off center will balance the rest of the composition that is less strong or less defined.



8. Avoid using the flash I rarely use flash unless I have to. I suggest using a tripod when shooting in low light.

9. Use a tripod with remote or timer for ultra sharp pictures The iPhone automatically adjusts for low light conditions and I have to say, it does a pretty good job of it. There are 2 drawbacks when shooting in low light 1- added noise. "Noise" are artifacts that the camera adds to the picture that gives it that "grainy" look. Sometimes that can add a cool gritty effect, sometimes not. The other effect that shooting in low light has is tendency to blur the picture. In low light conditions the camera slows down the shutter in order to get a good exposure. If you are hand holding the iPhone it often results in camera blur. By using a clip adapter and a tripod you eliminate camera shake, rendering a sharper image. I generally incorporate the timer when shooting with a tripod but you can also use the iPhone earphone cable to trip the shutter by manipulating the volume control.



10. Hold down the shutter button when shooting action. I discovered this feature

accidentally when shooting products in my studio. I had the camera mounted onto a tripod and inadvertently held the shutter down for a few seconds. The result of that action was a burst of images for the duration I had my finger on the shutter button. It did me absolutely no good when shooting still life but could be extremely useful when timing is critical. Use this feature when shooting sporting events, animals, children fireworks and lightning.

11. Try shooting in Black & White (mono feature). I love black and white for it's artistic and timeless quality. I use this feature when I want to test the strength of a composition. When a composition can hold it's own without the influence of color I am able to test it's strength. Try this yourself - it's a great exercise. Test your artistic skills in black and white first before returning to color - it will help you hone your compositional skills tremendously. To activate this feature, click "camera" and press the 3 circles at the bottom of the screen. You will notice an array of effects is there to choose from. Choose "mono" to activate the black and white mode. All of your captures will be monotone (black & white) until to reset it . To return to color mode, choose "none". Very simple.



12. Consider using a wide angle or macro external lens. Expand your creative vision and style by trying any number of iPhone lenses. Note: many of these external lenses require you to remove the phone case before the lens can be attached. There are many manufacturers on the market - weigh out the pros and cons, price vs quality. As a rule of thumb, put your money on good lenses - they do make a difference.





iPhone Image modified using HDR Scape Filter in Snapseed

13. Experiment with apps like Snapseed and Slow Shutter. Snapseed is an extremely robust program with features that will enhance most photos. You will find a wide array of tools and filters that will amaze you. Snapseed has tools that will let you adjust color, contrast, color saturation (including eliminating color entirely), photo retouching, vignetting and cropping. Some of the filters include lens blur, adding drama, retro, black and white and my personal favorite, HDR (high dynamic range). Slow Shutter is another cool app. As the name implies, Slow Shutter allows you to create impressionistic effects by slowing down the shutter.

Tip: It does take some time and practice to get good using Slow Shutter. There will be a lot of bloopers and only a few keepers. I suggest you be open to possibilities and let go of any preconceived ideas of what constitutes a "good picture". As with any experimental technique, it is a process that you will continually refine the more you practice.



iPhone Image Modified in PhotoMatix



iPhone Image captured using Slow Shutter app

14. Look for the light! This is another principle that I emphasize in all my workshops - after all, photography is nothing more than captured light, is it not? With iPhone photography in particular, one needs to be especially mindful as to the quality of the light because of the limited dynamic range the camera is capable of recording. This is especially evident when shoot outdoors. Most often the highlights become "blown out" or void of any detail whatsoever. There is nothing you can do except to recognize that this is one of the limitations to shooting with an iPhone especially when compared to a digital SLR. Because iPhones have a limited amount of tonal range they are capable of capturing one has to be mindful when shooting with even moderate contrasty light. Once you understand it's limitations you can still create great images as long as you work within these perimeters.



15. Rule of thirds for better compositions The Rule of Thirds is a compositional tool that has been present in art throughout the ages. Use the grid feature in Camera Settings. To activate the grid feature on your iPhone you will need to go into settings and click "Photos & Camera". Scroll down about half way and turn on the "Grid" feature. The rule of thirds is applied by aligning a subject with the guidelines and there intersecting points. You can also use the horizontal lines to determine where to place your horizon line when shooting landscapes. Photo Tip: The rule of thirds, like most "rules" is not etched in stone. There are many influences in any given photograph that factor in to it's overall success. I use it as a tool which may or may not improve my composition.



16. Use square format for Instagram and the rectangular format for prints. I will admit, I love squares. I don't know why - maybe because I'm so used to seeing everything laid out as a rectangle. Be that as it may, there are practical applications for a square format - one of which is Instagram which as an image creator needs to be considered. Aside from that, my belief is it's a personal choice - "whatever floats your boat"!

References

www.iPhoneart.com A community of mobile art
www.momentlens.co Worlds finest iPhone External Lenses and accessories
www.Photo-Tipster.com How to improve your photographic Skills

All Photos and Text by Bob Bretell

760-224-6191

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