

3 things I wish I knew when starting photography

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PHOTOGRAPHY HAS BEEN A HOBBY OF MINE FOR FOUR YEARS, BUT I ONLY STARTED EXPLORING IT PROPERLY ABOUT A YEAR AGO. I'VE SPENT THE LAST YEAR DEVELOPING MY SKILLS IN THE CRAFT AND WOULD LIKE TO SHARE THREE THINGS I'VE LEARNT.

1) START SHOOTING IN MANUAL ASAP

For the first three years I took photos in auto mode and it wasn't until June last year that I started shooting in manual.

Unaware of manual mode I turned up to a photography event in Birmingham organised by UK Shooters. With my camera set to auto I was ready to photograph some models, or so I thought. This was my first experience of taking portraits.

I sat with other photographers and we discussed what we liked to capture - architecture, people, and concerts. Noticing that my Nikon was set to auto the photographer next to me made a comment, "you aren't shooting in manual?"

"I don't know how to", I replied a little embarrassed.

He took me through the basics:

- Set your aperture first
- Keep your ISO as low as you can
- Don't drop your shutter speed below 1/80

After 3 hours of making it up as I went along, I was surprised at the difference in quality. A lot of my photos were overexposed and a few were blurry, but overall, the colour was more saturated and my images were sharper.

I was able to create a moody atmosphere and manipulate lighting to give my images a soft, sun-kissed look. Looks I couldn't create while letting my camera do all of the work for me.



2) EXPLORE COMPOSITION

It doesn't matter whether you are an amateur or a professional, revisiting the basics can be really beneficial for helping you to improve your photography. Before exploring different composition techniques like leading lines, rule of thirds and framing (to name a few), I used to take photos based on what 'felt right'. This meant I was missing out on the most creative aspects of photography.

I decided to assign myself a different technique to focus on every week and made a note of the camera settings I used to create each photo. This was beneficial for quickly learning what settings I should use in different lighting situations. Printing your photos and sticking them in a journal can help you with this, and it lets you see your progress over time. Writing down things you like and dislike about your pictures can help you to identify what makes a good photo, enabling you to work on the aspects you don't like.

3) THERE IS STILL ROOM FOR IMPROVEMENT

I recently watched a video that sums this third point up perfectly – Why BAD Photographers THINK They're Good by Jamie Windsor. For those who don't feel like watching it, the video explains that you don't know how good a photographer you are until you know how much there is to learn.

I was a bad photographer (not that I'm a great one now) because I didn't know much about photography. I thought I knew a lot because I received good feedback from friends and family, but it wasn't until I started looking at other people's work that I realised I was far from a professional.

I saw the likes of @Alessioalbi, @Olivia.Crutfield and @Rye_whiskey pictures and it put my skills into perspective. I became aware of how much there is to learn – foreground interest, prime lenses, lighting and editing that stretched beyond the capabilities of my free Adobe Lightroom mobile app.

If I had researched other photographers' work in the beginning I could have been using manual mode after my first year, instead of my third.

Although comparing your work to others' can turn you into your biggest critic, it will keep you humble and push you to work harder. It can also help you to find a style you like.

I'm still a long way from where I want to be, but I'm learning more and I'd like to think that I've improved from where I was four years ago.

