Essential Knowledge and General Rules of Photography

Some things to consider as you explore with your camera.

1. The slowest shutter speed that is recommended for handholding a photograph is the reciprocal of the focal length being used. Or to write it out more clearly:

   \[
   \frac{1}{\text{Focal Length}} = \text{the slowest handholdable shutter speed}
   \]

So, the slowest handheld shutter speed for a 210-mm lens is 1/210 second or since we don’t have a 1/210-second setting on the camera, use the 1/250th of a second. Note that this rule applies to zoom lenses as well! So, you must know what focal length your zoom setting is on. Using an 80-300 mm zoom lens at the 100-mm setting and 1/125 of a second is safe, but zooming to 300 mm now requires 1/500 of a second. Be careful!

2. All light meters read every object they meter as though it were middle gray.

3. Moving your body closer and farther from a subject is almost always more interesting than zooming in or out. Make a habit of composing by moving your body, and then fine tuning the composition by using your zoom.

4. You never get something for nothing in photography. Your accomplishments are directly proportional to the efforts you put in. Look at pictures, shoot more, learn and you will improve.

5. You get what you pay for with photographic equipment. Rule: never buy the bottom of the line and say away from too much glitz. Read the reviews in photographic magazines; they are useful. Ask fellow photographers and photo sales people. Then hold the equipment in your own hands and feel how it works. You have to use this tool, not anyone else. It should feel good and have room for you to grow.

6. Contrary to what manufacturers may advertise, you can’t buy your way into better pictures! Many of the best photos ever made were done with very basic simple camera. Shoot more film! Then consider whether you need more camera! (Refer to rule #5.)

7. You can always get a basic exposure setting in daylight by following the Sunny 16 rule:

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   \frac{1}{\text{ISO setting}} = \text{the shutter speed at F16 in bright sunlight}
   \]

It also follows that this speed will be F11 in hazy sun, F8 in partial overcast and F5.6 in full overcast. Remember to bracket.

8. On slow shutter speeds (below 1/60) always use a tripod and preferably a cable release. Just because archers and marksman can fire between their heartbeats doesn’t mean you can handhold slow shutter speeds. Yes! You will occasionally succeed at 1/30 of a second and sometimes, just maybe, at 1/15. But as a rule you are photographing on wobbly ground. Use a tripod. No tripod? Use a rock or a fence post. No cable release? Use your self-timer. In either case, get you body with its nerves, shakes and heartbeat away from your camera!

9. There is no one “right” composition for a subject. The key to good photography always rests in photographing a subject from different points of view, closer and farther away at the edge of the frame and centered, with depth and flat. The more you explore the better the pictures will get. Thank goodness that the writer’s we love didn’t settle for the first drafts of their manuscripts. Don’t you settle for the first draft of your photographs! Shoot, re-shoot, study your results and shoot again!