
Rules for Sharp Photographs

Hold it steady

The first step to sharp photographs is to practice good camera habits. Hold your camera in both hands. Plant your feet into the ground. Feel the stabilizing force of your legs, firmly planted and your elbows tucked into your ribs. Press the shutter smoothly and gently. Work fast, but calmly for the sharpest images.

One over the focal length

The Focal length of the lens makes a big difference in what shutter speed you can use to get a sharp photograph. When you use a telephoto lens, you magnify more than your subject. You also magnify every bump and shake from YOU holding the camera. Getting sharp photographs depends on your holding the camera steady, but as you change lenses, it may also depend on knowing this little rule.

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**Focal length EQUALS the slowest, safe shutter speed that can be hand-held...
but never under 1/60th of a second.**

Examples:

Normal lenses: On a 35mm camera, normal is 50mm. With a normal lens, the closest shutter speed to 1/50 is 1/60th.

Wide-angle lenses: A 35mm, 28mm, and a 24mm are common wide-angle lenses for a 35mm camera. Despite these wider angles, it is still recommended to use your 1/60th rule to be assured of sharp images.

Telephoto lenses: Lenses with focal lengths longer than 50mm are usually classified as telephoto lenses. These lenses give us the real sharpness challenge. If you have an 80 mm lens, your closest shutter speed using the 1/focal length rule is 1/125 of a second. With the popular 210mm lenses, you would need to use 1/250. And if you were lucky enough to have a 500mm lens, you would have to use 1/500th of a second! Round to the next fastest shutter speed when working with telephoto lenses.

Zoom lenses: Watch these convenient, but tricky lenses. If you have a 28-210 zoom, you can shoot at 1/60th UNTIL you hit your telephoto range. As you zoom in on the action, you must also choose faster shutter speeds.

- 1/1000 th of a second
- 1/500 ➤ This will work with your 300 or 500 mm lenses
- 1/250 ➤ Use for 210mm and 150 mm lenses
- 1/125 ➤ Safe for your 80mm lenses
- 1/60 ➤ **Slowest handholding speed that is safe**
- 1/30 ➤ *Tripod, monopod or risky business*
- 1/15 ➤ *Ditto*
- 1/8 ➤ *Tripod Territory*
- 1/4 ➤ *Tripod Territory*
- 1/2 ➤ *Tripod Territory*
- 1 second ➤ *Tripod Territory*