The Smartphone Photographer

5 WAYS TO

Improve Your Smartphone Photography

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Introduction

Hi there! Thank you for downloading this free ebook. In this ebook, I want to share with you five ways in which you can improve how you capture photographs with your smartphone in order to get great results every time.

But before we get into that, let me introduce myself.

My name is Gav, and I run the blog **The Smartphone Photographer** (TSP). My background is in filmmaking, mainly writing, producing, directing, and editing. I also happen to be a skilled video camera operator. For the past five years or so, my focus has mostly been on lecturing college students in the art of filmmaking. A job I love with all my heart.

Although there are some similarities between photography and videography (I'm really not a fan of the latter term), I've never done any sort of photography-- not in a professional capacity, at least. I've always been happy to just let the stills camera run on auto (something I never do with a video camera) and only worry about composition.

When mobile phones with cameras were introduced in the early 2000s, they changed everything. I've probably taken tens of thousands of pictures with my camera phone since I got my first one back in 2004. However, I never thought of using the camera in a more serious manner. That is until recently.

The day I discovered smartphone photography, I was hooked. Immediately! There, in my hands, was this device that was always with me that I could do so much with photographically. I just had to share what I was learning with other people because surely I was not the only one who was under-utilizing their mobile camera's potential.

And that's how TSP was born. Everything I learn, I put on the blog. Yes, I'm still learning. No matter how good I might think I am or may become, I'd be a fool to think I'm done learning. Knowledge never stops.

Granted, most of my first posts on TSP were quite technical but I think that it's best to know how the tool you're using works before you can make magic with it.

With this ebook, I hope to keep spreading knowledge just like I do on my blog. Some of the things I've written about in here (e.g. composition) are things I already knew as a filmmaker. Other things were new to me. But all that doesn't matter. I'm just happy to share what I know with you.

Most important worth noting is that NOT ALL photographs featured in this book were taken by me. I have also included photographs from other mobile photographers that I found on Unsplash.com. All photos are credited on the last page of this book.

5 Ways To Improve Your Photography is a free resource that contains neither explicit nor implicit advertising. There are no affiliate links and I stand to make no money from the distribution of this material. I receive no compensation from anyone mentioned anywhere in this material.

That being said, I hope you find great value in the pages of this book and spread this knowledge on to others.

Gav

1. COMPOSITION

When a composer composes music, they're essentially arranging the notes in a way that will create a great piece of music.

Likewise, in photography, composition refers to the way objects and people are positioned and arranged within the frame of the photo.

Composition is one of the most important things to understand in photography because good composition results in great photos. For you to compose a visually pleasing photo, you need to know how to arrange the elements in the frame according to their importance.

Let's have a look at a few *guiding* principles of composition. I put emphasis on 'guiding' because even though these principles may be called rules, they are not set in stone. But that's a detail for another day.

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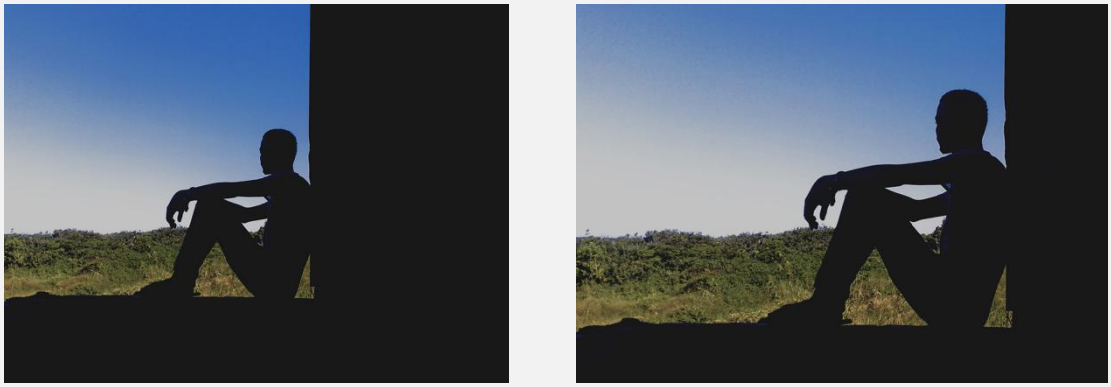
1.1 Rule of Thirds

This is the most fundamental principle of composition.

To apply the rule of thirds, you need to imagine the photo has two evenly spaced lines running horizontally across and another two lines running down vertically, effectively dividing the photo into nine equal parts.

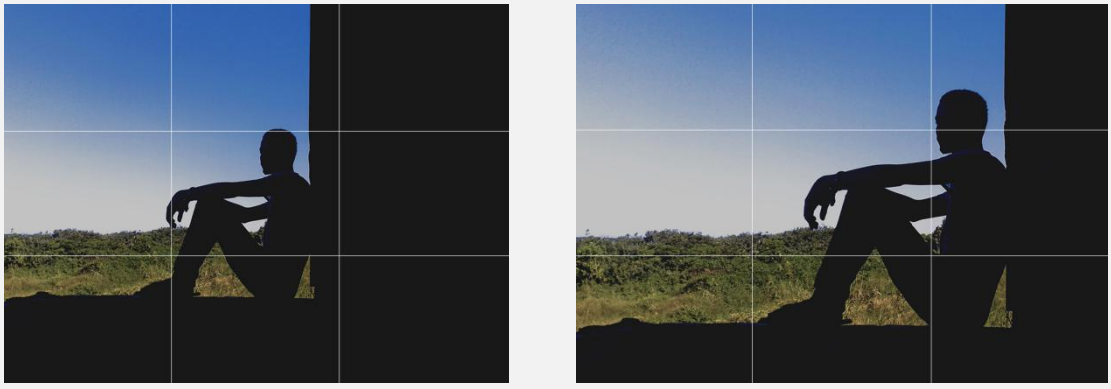
The idea behind this theory is that photos are more visually appealing when the subjects in them are aligned with the imaginary lines that divide the photo. Important features such as eyes and faces are framed where the lines intersect.

Have a look at the two photos below. They're both shots of the same subject but composed differently. One of them applies the rule of thirds while the other doesn't. Can you pick out which one follows the rule?



(*fig. 1*) Which of these above photos looks more visually pleasing?

Notice how the photo on the right in *figure 1* looks better compared to the other? Now, let's look at the same images again. This time, I'll include the imaginary lines. Pay attention to where the lines intersect and where the subject in positioned in the frame.



(*fig. 2*) Using the gridlines can help you compose better shots.

The most important thing in that photo is the subject in it. Instead of positioning them in the middle of the frame, put the subject off-centre to the right or left where the vertical lines run down.

If it's a full-body shot, then you'll have to position the head around where the vertical and horizontal lines cross in the top left or top right. The positioning doesn't have to be exact, but as close as possible.

In the beginning, you might struggle to figure out where to draw the imaginary lines but luckily that shouldn't be a problem on your smartphone. Your camera app can overlay a grid on your screen that will help you apply the rule of thirds in your photos.

With time, you will get used to using the rule of thirds and can then turn off the grid. By this time it will be like second nature to you and you won't even realise you're doing it.

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1.2 Rule of Space

This rule states that when the subject of the photo is not facing the camera directly but rather facing slightly off-camera (3/4 profile) or looking out the frame, then there should be enough space for the subject to look into. This is called 'active space'. The area behind the subject is known as 'dead space'.

(*fig. 3*) Active space and dead space

Framing your shot in such a way that there is little active space compared to dead space makes the photo look a bit unappealing especially if the subject is alone in the frame.

However, this is acceptable if there is someone else or something of interest behind the subject in which case the second subject can be positioned in the first subject's dead space within the frame of the shot.

This rule doesn't just apply to people but to moving objects like cars, bicycles, animals, etc., too. The active space should be greater than the

dead space so as to express the idea that the object is moving forward and has a destination. An important thing to remember when framing a shot with people is to avoid chopping the tops of people's heads off by giving them little to no headroom.

Make sure you give your subjects enough headroom but not too much unless something is happening above the subject's head.

Also, do not cut them off at the joints. This ends up making them look dismembered. Instead, frame from above or below the joints.

However, when taking a close up shot focusing on a detail on the face (such as eyes) then it's acceptable to chop off parts of the head to in order to get close enough to get the shot you want.

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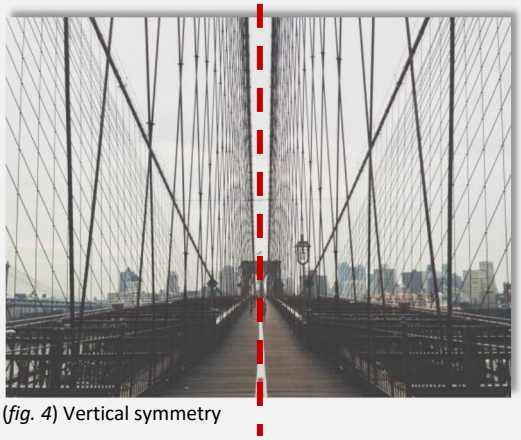
1.3 Symmetry

Images that apply symmetry tend to convey a sense of balance and harmony because the human eye finds it appealing.

There are many ways to achieve symmetry but the most common in photography is to do so by creating a photo that would have two identical halves if it were divided into two. The one side is quite identical to the other. This symmetry can be either vertical or horizontal.



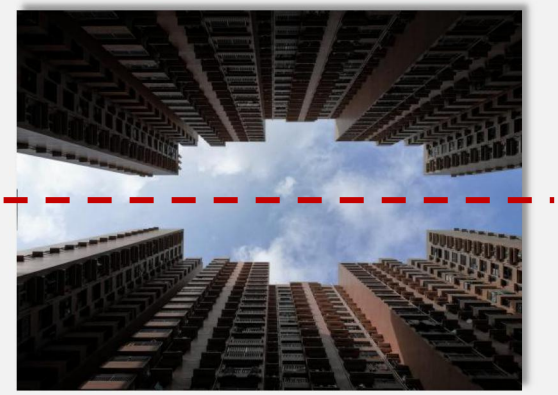
(*fig. 4*) Vertical symmetry

Vertical Symmetry

This is probably the most common type of symmetry. Vertical symmetry occurs when, if you draw an imaginary line (known as the 'line of symmetry') vertically down from the absolute centre of the frame, the left half and the right half appear almost identical if not exactly the same.

Architectural photography is where you find vertical symmetry a lot but it's not limited to that. You can find it almost everywhere.

For example, an open road with identical trees on either side can give you a nice symmetrical shot.



(*fig. 5*) Horizontal symmetry

Horizontal Symmetry

This is similar to vertical symmetry just horizontally. The line of symmetry suns horizontally across the middle of the frame with the bottom half of the frame mirroring the top. Reflections in things like water is a good example of this.

If you go to a calm lake, you'll find that the surrounding environment and the elements in the sky are perfectly reflected in the water.

Holding your phone horizontally and aligning where the reflection begins with the centre of the frame will result in a well balanced horizontally symmetrical image.

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1.4 Simplification

(*fig. 6*) Simplification makes it easier for the eye to focus on the subject.

Simplification, as the name suggests, is a very simple concept to understand. It is basically a composition technique where a photo is stripped down to its most important elements that support what the image is about.

This is so that the eye doesn't get distracted by anything else in the frame and wander off.

When you come across a scene you'd like to shoot, it can be very tempting to want to include everything in the picture. However, this is not always a great idea.

An overly populated photo can cause visual overload for the viewer where they end up not knowing where to look or what the picture is about.

Simplification can be regarded as minimalism. It aims to remove all the extraneous elements in the frame so that the eye can focus on one thing. Granted, this might not be easy especially when doing things like street photography or taking landscape photos out in nature.

In such instances, you can reframe your shot or change your angle of view in order to get rid of some elements in the background.

And if possible, depending on your phone's computational capabilities, you can limit your focus to your subject only and blur out the background.

The above photo with the hand hand flower is an example of the principle of simplification. The background is defocused, uncluttered and almost entirely the same colour.

This helps draw the eyes of the viewer to what the picture is about-- a hand holding out a small flower.

Just to recap on Point 1: Composition

- **Use the rule of thirds.** By aligning your subjects with the imaginary lines that run across the frame, you can create visually pleasing images.
- **Apply the rule of space.** Make sure there's enough space in the direction in which the subject is facing.
- **Symmetry is appealing.** Images that have two halves that appear identical tend to convey a sense of balance and harmony because the human eye finds it engaging.
- **Simplification.** By decluttering your shot, you remove all other elements that would have otherwise distracted the eye from the main focus of the photo.

2. LIGHTING

Lighting is by far the most important thing in photography. Without it, photography wouldn't even exist.

It's important not only because light is what the camera captures to create an image, but it also affects how your subject looks.

Light has many properties. Whether you're taking pictures indoors or outdoors, once you understand lighting you can use it to create the images you want.

There are two types of lighting: natural lighting and artificial lighting. We'll look at both and the best way to use them.

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2.1 Natural lighting

The term "natural lighting" refers to lighting that is readily available in nature. The sun is the primary source of natural light and works very well for photography.

The moon and stars are also a source of natural light. Unfortunately, smartphone cameras still struggle with capturing good photos at night.

Other sources of natural lighting are fire and lightning. Although the former is much easier to control and work with than the latter, you can use both these elements to illuminate your photos.

The main focus of this section is the natural light that comes from the sun and the best way to work with it outdoors and indoors.

Working With Natural Light Outdoors

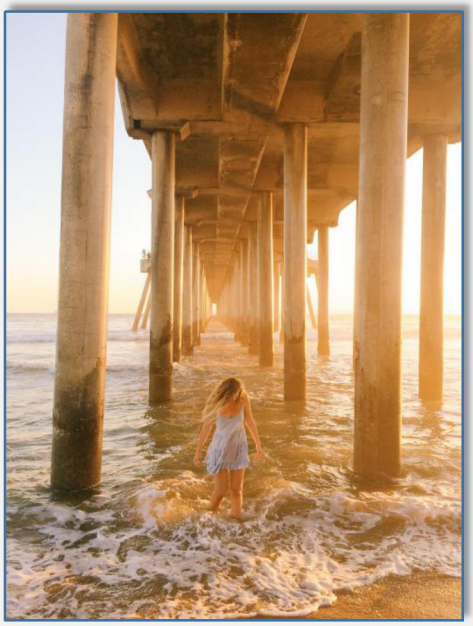
The best to work with natural light is obviously outdoors because of how abundant it is. It's worth noting, though, that this light is not the same throughout the day. Weather conditions can also affect the quality of the light.

Here are some of the things you need to consider when working with natural light outdoors.

Time of day
As the sun moves across the sky from sunrise to sunset, it gives off light with varying intensities and colour temperatures. As a result, certain times of day are ideal for taking photos using natural light outdoors.

For example, shooting during "golden hour", which is roughly an hour from sunrise and an hour before the sun sets, will result in really beautiful and dramatic photos.

During this time, the light from the sun appears quite warm in colour and creates long shadows that can be incorporated into your pictures.



(*fig. 7*) The sun gives off a warm glow during golden hour.

Outside of the golden hour, another great time to take photos outdoors is mid-morning and afternoon. This time is perfect for general photography because the light is subtle, which means the highlights won't be overly blown out and harsh shadows won't be a problem.

As the sun continues across the sky, the light given off by the sun increases in contrast and the colour temperature becomes more neutral.

Midday is the least desirable time of day to take photos because the sun is directly above and at its harshest.

If your subject is a person, during this time you might find that things like caps, hats and even foreheads cast shadows around the eyes and that's hardly ever a good look.

It's a good time to take pictures of surfaces like water because the light penetrates deeper and makes the water more transparent.

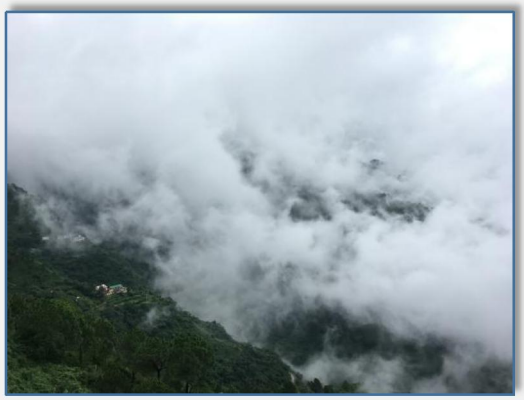
When dealing with harsh light from the sun, you may consider finding a shaded area to shoot under to diffuse the harsh light. Ideally, you'd want to find an area that is evenly covered so that you don't end up with unwanted areas of bright light in your photo. Another option would be to use a scrim or diffuser.

Weather

The points mentioned above all assume you are shooting under clear skies. And although this type of weather can give you enough light to work with and create stunning images, sometimes the best time to make use of natural light for photography is when clouds are covering the sky. Why?

Clouds are essentially nature's diffuser and therefore soften the light from the sun that causes harsh shadows. This is perfect for shooting portraits with your smartphone among other things because it is easier to work with and can produce interesting, evenly lit photos.

The contrast may seem low but it will be a breeze to adjust in post-processing.



(*fig. 8*) Clouds can give images a different mood.

Just as how a picture taken on a bright, sunshiny day can evoke feelings of warmth and summer fun under the sun, clouds can also affect the tone of your shot.

The grey and dullness of the scene can convey a sense of bleakness or misery. The heavier the cloud cover, the more emphasized those moods are.

Scattered clouds also provide interesting shots, especially for landscapes. If you have the time, you can wait for the sun to shine through the clouds often creating rays of light that appear to pierce through the clouds.

This works especially well with storm clouds because of the contrast between their darkness and the bright spot of land where the sun reaches directly.

It's good practice to check the weather before you go out to take pictures with your smartphone so that you know what to expect. This way you can plan your shoot in such a way that will make the most of that day's weather conditions.

Positioning

Even if you take a photograph at the best time of day under the most ideal weather conditions, if you don't get the positioning right, your photo might turn out less than impressive.

What do I mean by positioning? Basically, I'm referring to how your subject is positioned in relation to the direction or angle of the light. For example, your subject could be positioned in such a way that the light illuminates the subject directly from the front.

Light from this angle can partly or completely remove shadows from your subject and can provide really good lighting for outdoor photography.

This, however, is not necessarily the best angle from which to a photo because, if your subject is a person, the direct sunlight to their face may cause them to squint.

You'd also need to be aware of where your shadow falls as the photographer since the sun will be behind you so that it doesn't creep into the shot.

Another option to explore is to position the subject with their back to the sun thus essentially shooting into the sun. The backlight

this provides can cast a nice glow around the subject's hair.

This position can also make for some really cool shots with some lens flares. And if the sun is low enough on the horizon, it can make for some really beautiful silhouettes.

(*fig. 9*) A light source behind the subject creates a silhouette

Alternatively, you can have the light hit your subject from the side. This is actually an excellent way of adding texture and character to your shot. But even though this angle works really well, it can go wrong, too.

The idea is to use the shadows cast by the light from this direction to make your subject more three dimensional, but at the wrong angle you might find odd shadows cast on the face by the nose, for instance. So be mindful of how the shadows affect your subject.

If you're not too sure how to position your subject, position them where you'd like to take your shot and walk around them and note how the lighting falls on them from every angle. Have them face you as you walk around until you find an angle which provides you with the angle of lighting you're happy with.

Also, take several pictures as you do this. You can choose the best ones later.

Working With Natural Light Indoors

(*fig. 10*) Natural light from a window can help illuminate your subject indoors.

Shooting indoors using natural light depends heavily on having fixtures and areas that allow light into the room. These include things such as windows, doors, skylights, etc.

To get the best results when shooting indoors using natural light, you need to make sure that any source of artificial light is turned off. The two different colour temperatures of the artificial light and natural light don't usually go well together.

So, what do you need to keep in mind when shooting indoors with natural light?

Time of day
The movement of the sun throughout the day means the lighting in the room you're in will change as the day progresses

For this reason, you need to be familiar with the space you're going to be shooting in and how light affects it at different times of the day.

If you're shooting at home, take time to explore the different rooms in your house to see what type of light hits which room and at what time. Make a note of this. Soon enough you'll know which room to use at what time in order to take advantage of the lighting you need for your shot.

Control
Is there such a thing as too much light? Yes, there certainly is. A flood of light in a room results in flat light, which can end up ruining an image because of the lack of depth and lack of contrast it creates.

To avoid such a situation, you need to take control of the lighting through. To diffuse the light entering through a window, you could hang up a thin piece of white material. The thicker the material, the more the light will be softened.

If your aim is to limit the amount of light coming in by quite a lot, then your best option is to use blackouts. This is any thick, dark material that you can use to block the light or aim it in whatever direction you want. You can use this method to create some really dramatic shots with light and shadows.

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2.2 Artificial lighting

This refers to lighting that is not natural but rather electronic. This includes camera flashes, LED lights, house lights, etc. One good thing about artificial lighting is that it is easy to manipulate. You can adjust the colour temperature, intensity, and direction as you please.

Artificial lighting is commonly used indoors although it can also be used outdoors, especially at night.

Using Artificial Lighting Indoors

Artificial lighting indoors can come in several forms. The most common is house lights. These can be ceiling lights, wall lights, or even side lamps. Other artificial sources of light can be appliances such as a fridge or electronics and devices such as TVs and phones.

The best thing to do when shooting indoors is to…

Take advantage of available lighting
This might seem obvious but you have no idea how many people ignore this or simply don't understand how to use the available light to their advantage.

The house lights in your home or any room you're in can be a great source of light. The best place to take the best pictures is where the light is.

All you have to do is position your subject in such a way that the light will illuminate them to your liking.

Set up lights
As much as taking advantage of available light might make a difference in your photos, sometimes it might not be enough or it can be limiting.

This is especially true if you're trying to go for a specific look that you can't get from house lights. For this, you'll need to set up some lights.

A flash is a great source of light for photography. However, the flash on your smartphone is not ideal and should **never** be used when taking photos. It makes photos look flat and unflattering.

If you want to use flash, your best bet for better quality photos is to use off-camera flash.

There aren't that many off-camera flash options for mobile phones but some pretty cool ones exist. The two that come to mind are the Godox A1 and the Profoto C1. These are essentially small studio lights for smartphones. You can position them anywhere because they're wireless.

How you position your flash is largely dictated by your subject's pose and position. Because naturally, we're used to seeing light come from above (e.g. the sun, house lights), it's often good practice to have your flash or additional light source be positioned somewhat, but not directly, above the subject and at an angle.

However, this is not a hard and fast rule. Another thing that dictates where you need to position your light source, how many you will need, and how bright the light should be is the mood and tone you're trying to achieve.

Your light source can be also be something else other than flash. Continuous light like the Lumimuse LED Light by Manfrotto can work just as well. And if spending money is not an option, you can turn on the flashlight on other phones or devices and position them the way that will give you the lighting you want.

(*fig. 11*) Fire can be a source of light at night.

Artificial Lighting Outdoors

Available artificial lighting outdoors can come in the form of brightly lit storefronts, neon signs, LED displays, etc.

If you're walking down the street at night, you can quickly use the opportunity as you walk past a shop with bright lights or a neon/LED sign to take a snap of whatever your subject may be.

Street lights are also a good source of lighting. You just need to know what you want to get out of it. As mentioned earlier, you could move your subject closer to the street lamp and position in such a way that the light falls on them enough to get a good photograph.

Alternatively, you can take a different approach and capture a silhouette. In this instance, you'd

use the street lamp as a backlight behind the subject. After adjusting the focus of your photo, you'd then have to bring down the exposure until your subject appears as a silhouette. Silhouettes are perfect for adding drama and mystery to your pictures.

A very important thing to remember about using available lighting is the positioning of your subject. The direction they're facing and how the light hits them will greatly affect the look and mood of your photograph.

Perhaps you find yourself in a place where there is no available light. Maybe you're camping out in nature. What then? Create your own light!

Fire, as mentioned earlier, is a natural source of light. But because you have to make it yourself, some people consider it artificial. So, I'll mention it again here. Fire is an integral part of camping or daily life in some parts of the world. It's can be a great source of light for photography.

Things like flashlights and lanterns can work just as well. One or even a couple of well-positioned flashlights can really improve your nighttime outdoors snaps drastically.

The lights on your car can also offer a lighting solution if used strategically. You might need to diffuse them quite a bit, though.

When shooting outdoors at night, whatever can give you light is your friend.

Just to recap on Point 2: Lighting

- **Working with natural lighting outdoors.** The weather and time of day affect the quality of light. Position your subject in a way that will ensure they are well lit and your shadow doesn't come into the shot.
- **Working with natural lighting indoors.** Use windows and other sources of natural light to your advantage. See how the lighting changes in each room as the day progresses. You can control the amount of light coming through by using blackouts and diffusion.
- **Using artificial lighting indoors.** Take advantage of the lighting available to you such as house lights. Alternatively, you can set up lights such as external flashes for smartphones or continuous LED lights.
- **Artificial lighting outdoors.** If you're taking pictures outdoors at night, it's best to take photos where there's enough lighting. This could be from street lamps or storefronts with bright lights.
- **Do not use the flash on your phone.** The light is horrible and will leave your photos looking quite unflattering.

3. MANUAL MODE

Taking photographs in Manual mode allows you to control the settings of the camera, pretty much the same way you would on a normal DSLR camera.

With this mode, you can control things like ISO and shutter speed. These two combined with aperture (which is not adjustable on most smartphones) form what is known as the Exposure Triangle.

These manual settings can make a big difference in your mobile photography.

ISO

ISO refers to the camera's image sensor's sensitivity to light. A low number means the sensor is less sensitive to light. A higher number means the camera will be more sensitive to light.

In other words, if you're shooting in bright light conditions, you'll have to bring your ISO down in order to avoid overexposing your shots.

But if you're shooting in low lighting conditions, your ISO will need to be dialed up, so the image can be brighter.

The catch? Too much sensitivity results in photos that have "noise" in them.

Shutter speed

Shutter speed is expressed in seconds and it refers to how fast the shutter opens and closes. The longer it stays open, the more light gets to the camera.

The shorter it stays open; the less light reaches the camera.

Therefore, if you shoot with a slow shutter speed like 1s (one second), your picture will come out brighter than if you shot with a fast shutter speed like 1/3000s (one three-thousandth of a second).
You can use a slow shutter speed creatively at night to create things like light trails and light paintings.

If you want to take a perfectly sharp photo of a fast-moving subject mid-action without any motion blur, such as someone jumping up, you'll need to set a fast shutter speed.

However, there's also a catch here. The longer the shutter stays active, the more your images will turn out blurry from even the slightest movement.

To avoid landing in the pitfalls of blurry or noisy photos, you need to learn how to balance ISO and shutter speed together.

Focus

The auto-focus system on smartphone cameras works really well. So, it makes focusing fairly simple and quick. You can just tap anywhere on the screen where you want to focus, and the camera will focus for you.

Manual focus works similarly to how it does on a normal camera but instead it's a focus slider on the screen, not a focus ring on a lens. You simply adjust the slider to where you want to focus.

It may seem like more work to focus manually this way, but sometimes mobile phone cameras can struggle to find focus, especially in low light. In this case, focusing manually may prove to be more effective.

Having full control of these and other settings allows you to take images that look the way that you want them to look, not the smartphone's calculations of what it "thinks" looks good. You are in control of how you want to deal with various lighting situations.

(fig. 12) Auto mode

(fig. 13) Manual mode

Not to say that Auto Mode doesn't take good pictures. It most certainly does. Sometimes you just want to do your own thing. Without being able to control your camera settings manually, what you can do visually with your images becomes very limited.

With Manual mode, what you can do creatively is only limited by your imagination (and of course, the camera's abilities). However, without knowing what the tool you're carrying can and can't do, you won't be able to fully explore your potential. So, take the time to learn how to use the manual settings of your phone's camera.

Does this mean you have to shoot manual all the time? Of course not! With things like street photography, it oftentimes might be easier to shoot on the go in Auto mode. However, when time allows and you're in control, it's always good to take the time to set up your shot, choose your settings, and capture the image that you want to.

If your native camera app doesn't have a Manual mode, then you may want to consider installing a third-party app. These are sometimes better than the Manual mode that comes with the stock camera app.

Just to recap on Point 3: Manual Mode

- **Using Manual mode gives you control.** Instead of the camera deciding for itself how the photo should look, you can choose your own settings to get the image you want.
- **ISO.** Turning the ISO up to a higher value brightens up your image. But turning it up too much will introduce noise
- **Shutter speed.** The slower the shutter speed, the longer the sensor is exposed to light. If you want pictures that look frozen in time with no motion blur, use a fast shutter speed.
- **Focus.** You can adjust the focus manually by sliding your finger across a slider. This is useful in situations where the camera might struggle with auto-focus or if you want to play around with focus creatively.
- **Download some apps.** Most native camera apps are pretty decent. However, there are some pretty decent third-party camera apps you can try out.

4. EDITING

Learning to take good pictures is the first step to improving your smartphone photography. Following the advice is in the previous points will greatly help you do so.

The next step is post-processing, better known as editing. This is where you take the images you've just captured and tweak them to look even better or manipulate them to create certain effects.

How you edit your photo can make or break it visually. So, it's important that you don't overdo it. Below are some points to keep in mind when editing so that you don't ruin a potentially good photo.

Don't rely on editing
Funny as it may sound, the first and foremost tip about editing is to not rely on it, especially to fix your photos. You can't polish a turd. The same is true for a bad photo. You can't fix it no matter how much you edit it.

Remember, editing is about enhancing a photo. So, if your pictures are not that great, to begin with, you need to develop some photography skills.

Reading this e-book and others is a step in the right direction. Applying the points already mentioned will help you take great pictures before you edit them.

Go easy on the beauty treatments
Having flawless skin is a desire for a lot of people and many photo editing apps have a feature that can satisfy that desire, at least digitally. And although there's nothing wrong with doing skin touch-ups, too much can ruin your photo.

Skin has texture. Going overboard with smoothing it out digitally will make the skin look plastic and fake. This will definitely detract from the quality of the photo.

The same applies to whitening teeth and adding some sparkle to the eyes. It's absolutely fine to want to add a bit of glam to the subject in your photo.

However, over-enhancing things like the eyes will make your subject seem unreal and alien.

Avoid using filters unnecessarily
Almost every photo editing app I've used comes with its own set of filters. Applying one to your photos can instantly change their look quite dramatically. But tempting as this may be, I'd advise against simply pasting a filter and leaving it at that.

Filters are basically presets that were created using photos that may have been exposed differently to yours. Simply adding a filter might overexpose the highlights or bring down the shadows way too much.

If you throw on a filter, you adjust some of the parameters of the filter if the app you're using allows it.

Also, don't just make a picture black and white just for the sake of it. I'm a big fan of black and white photos and I think a lot of people can agree with me when I say that there's just something amazing and captivating about those images.

However, simply converting a picture to monochrome doesn't mean it will look good or arty. Some photos look best in colour. If you're going to change a photo to black and white, analyze the photo first.

If the colours aren't appealing and the shot has a lot of high contrast, then you can go ahead and convert the photo to black and white.

Too much of a good thing can be bad
Editing a photo can be as fun as capturing it. And if you're trying out an editing app for the first time, it's easy to get carried away. This is where it can all go wrong.

There more features available on the app, the more some people want to add to your image. If you do this, you might end up with a photo that looks unnatural. The attention will be shifted from the subject of the photo to the added effects and filters. Remember, sometimes less is more.

The thing with editing is that it's very subjective. What I may think of as over-the-top editing, someone else might find perfectly okay. Therefore, it's very difficult to say what's

sufficient and what's not without bringing my own bias into the picture. Excuse the pun.

However, don't forget that smartphone cameras don't have big sensors, so there's only so much light they can take it in when capturing images. As a result, they're highly susceptible to digital noise.

If you go too far with the edit, you might start seeing noise, pixelation, or other artefacts. When this happens, it's best to tone it down a notch to avoid destroying the quality of your image.

My advice is, if you want your photo to look natural, keep the edit to a minimum. If over-the-top is what you're aiming for, then go wild.

Download some apps

Of course, one cannot edit their photos without using software specially designed for that purpose. Many phones have their own photo editing function which works well enough to make some adjustments to your photos.

However, you'll often find that what you can do is rather limited. If you want more flexibility, you'll need to download a third-party app.

There are plenty of apps available to choose from. My personal favourite is Snapseed. It's an advanced photo editing app that allows you to create professional-level edits on your phone.

All the edits and effects you add are stacked on top of each other and can be changed individually.

A nice thing about this app is that it doesn't compromise the quality of your images by compressing them. The best part is that it's absolutely free.

Other popular apps are VSCO and Adobe Lightroom. VSCO has a variety of filters but it also allows you to change a variety of settings like exposure, tone, contrast, fade, etc.
Lightroom has similar features in its free version.
However, if you upgrade, you get access to more advanced features.

Just to recap on Point 4: Editing

- **Don't rely solely on editing.** Editing can only get you so far. You need to start by taking great photos from the get-go.
- **Go easy on the beauty treatments.** It's fine to touch up the skin and face but not to the point of looking unnatural.
- **Avoid overusing filters unnecessarily.** Filters are nice but can ruin a photo. Use them sparingly.
- **Too much of a good thing can be bad.** So, don't go overboard when editing and adding effects. Less is more.
- **Download some apps.** Even though the native editor on your phone can do some adjustments, third-party apps can give you more parameters to adjust.

5. INSPIRATION AND PRACTICE

One of the best ways to improve your smartphone photography is to have a look at what others are doing and learn from them. Study what they do and the techniques that they use.

From there you can try to replicate what they have done and see if you can get the same results. If you notice that you're not quite there yet, then keep going at it and practice until you get there.

There are plenty of places online you can go where you can find inspiration and learn from others. The Smartphone Photographer is one such site that seeks to inform and educate people on ways to better understand and improve their mobile photography.

Below are just some other great places online where you can find inspiration and learn from others.

Blogs
If you search around the net for blogs that showcase great photography works, there are plenty of places you can go to find some really stunning photo works, though captured mostly on bigger cameras.

And although you can get inspiration from photos captured on bigger cameras, it's all the more inspiring to see what other people can do with their smartphone cameras despite their limitations.

Compared to DSLR photography blogs, quality mobile photography blogs that showcase awesome work are few and far apart, making them a bit hard to find. But if you look, you'll find some gems.

One of my favourites is iPhone Art Girl, which is run by Meri Walker. She's a very experienced photographer and has published, exhibited, and taught at universities. Once she discovered the camera capabilities of her iPhone and how much she can do on one device, she ditched traditional photography and never looked back.

Her blog showcases the art she has created with her phone. She also offers workshops and classes. Apart from her site, you can also find her work on Instagram (@iphoneartgirl)

Another blog worth checking out is No Camera Bag, run by Chris Veichtner. This site features a portfolio of his work as well as tutorials and recommendations.

The site also touches on travel and great spots for photography. His work is simply amazing! It's definitely worth checking out.

Forums
The community of mobile photographers is actually quite large and participating in this community can help you improve your smartphone photography.

You can reach out to more experienced mobile photographers for tips and advice on whatever you may be struggling with.

Forums are a great place to find fellow mobile photographers. I can think of no better forum to recommend besides Mobitog. The community is absolutely fantastic and very welcoming.

There are lots of posts in different categories that can inspire you, educate you, help you with a problem, or just give you a platform to discuss mobile photography in general.

And, of course, there's Reddit. If you're familiar with it, you'll know that unlike Mobitog, Reddit is not a forum that exclusively deals with smartphone photography.

There are endless subreddits on endless topics. But if you do a quick search for it, you'll find several subreddits that deal with photography on mobile phones. Engaging there as well might help broaden your knowledge.

Social media
This is arguably the biggest space where you can find mobile photographer exhibiting their work and sharing it with the world. And what better place to find such works than on the very popular Instagram?

Searching for mobile photography will give you results for scores of accounts that have some amazing images captured with smartphones.

An awesome account I found is @the_phonephotographer. His work mostly features mountains, landscapes, and bodies of

water but the quality of his phone shots is fantastic. His weapon of choice is the iPhone and boy does he know how to shoot with that thing! Check him out.

Some of the accounts you'll find do not feature the work of just one artist, but rather a collection of work from contributors on Instagram and sometimes perhaps elsewhere on the internet.

One such account is @mobile__photography___. It is a very popular account and has over 3 100 posts more than 260k followers. The images they post are really stunning and might inspire some creativity in you.

Facebook, no matter what you think of it, is a great place to see other people's work. If you search for them, you'll find perhaps hundreds of groups and pages that specifically showcase smartphone photos.

Some of these groups only share photos captured with a specific brand of smartphone, or even strictly a particular phone. Find the groups that you like that inspire you and join them.

The internet is vast and full of wonders and information. I'm pretty sure there are plenty more sources of inspiration and learning that you can find the more you search for them.

Practice

It's one thing to learn these five ways to improve your smartphone photography but knowledge without application is useless. The only way you can improve your photography is to practice. As they say-- practice makes perfect.

The more you do something, the better at it you'll become as time goes. So, make sure you take a lot of pictures regularly. But don't just go around taking photos randomly. Be deliberate about it.

Set goals for yourself and try to achieve them. For example, if your goal is to understand and get better at using Manual mode, go out and take multiple pictures while experimenting with different settings. In time, you'll know exactly which settings to adjust to get the images you want.

If you draw inspiration from other mobile photographers, try to recreate some of your favourite pictures that they have taken.

Once you've done that, compare your image with theirs and see if you've come close or if there's still room for improvement.

Be critical of your work but don't be too hard on yourself. We all learn from our mistakes. So, if you're just starting out, allow yourself room to learn. Practice until you become as good as you can be.

Just to recap on Point 5: Inspiration and Practice

- **Look for inspiration.** There are plenty of places online where you can find inspiration. Visit informative blogs and follow other mobile photographers on social media. Join groups, forums and online communities that deal specifically with mobile photography.
- **Practice.** Don't just sit around with all the knowledge you gain. Get up and put it to practice. It's the only way you can really improve your smartphone photography.

LINKS AND CREDITS

That's it from me, folks. I hope you learned something from this book. Of course, I didn't cover everything in this free ebook. I wish I could. However, be on the lookout for my upcoming book that covers these points and seven more in full detail.

For more informative reading or if you'd like to contact me, visit
www.thesmartphonephotographer.com

You can also follow TSP on social media
Instagram: @the_smartphonephotographer

Credits

Fig. 1 & *Fig. 2*: "Against Zee Wall" by Gav Letsoalo (2015)
Camera: Samsung Galaxy S3 Mini | ISO: 50 | Shutter: 1/841s | Aperture: f/2.6

Fig. 3: "Sunset Drive" by Gav Letsoalo (2017)
Camera: Samsung Galaxy S8 | ISO: 40 | Shutter: 1/1624s | Aperture: f/1.7

Fig. 4: by Skyler Smith from Unsplashed (2015)
Camera: Apple iPhone 5c | ISO: 50 | Shutter: 1/1261s | Aperture: f/2.4

Fig. 5: by Chuan from Unsplash (2019)
Camera: Huawei Nova 3i | ISO: 50 | Shutter: 1/1400s | Aperture: f/2.2

Fig. 6: "Hand A Flower" by Gav Letsoalo (2017)
Camera: Samsung Galaxy S8 | ISO: 40 | Shutter: 1/1624s | Aperture: f/1.7

Fig. 7: "Kasuali Sky" by Aniruddha Bhattacharya from Unsplashed (2017)
Camera: Apple iPhone 6s | ISO: 25 | Shutter: 1/499s | Aperture: f/2.2

Fig. 8: "Padding Beneath The Boardwalk" by Greg Rakozy from Unsplashed (2016)
Camera: Apple iPhone 5s | ISO: 32 | Shutter: 1/268s | Aperture: f/2.2

Fig. 9: "Fishing In Sweden Sunset" by Saurabh Sarkar from Unsplashed (2015)
Camera: Apple iPhone 4 | ISO: 100 | Shutter: 1/240s | Aperture: f/2.8

Fig. 10: "Kenny" by Gav Letsoalo (2017)
Camera: Samsung Galaxy S8 | ISO: 40 | Shutter: 1/125s | Aperture: f/1.7

Fig. 11: "3 a.m. Summer Nights" by Jim Chesek (2018)
Camera: Samsung Galaxy S9 | ISO: 400 | Shutter: 1/50s | Aperture: f/1.7

Fig. 12: "Light Handed" by Gav Letsoalo (2019) [Auto]
Camera: Huawei Y7 (2019) | ISO: 130 | Shutter: 1/30s | Aperture: f/1.8

Fig. 13: "Light Handed" by Gav Letsoalo (2019) [Manual]
Camera: Huawei Y7 (2019) | ISO: 100 | Shutter: 1/400s | Aperture: f/1.8

This free ebook is only a small part of the more in-depth learning material still to come.

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