

How to make your photographs sharp **Author S.M.Kitchener 2012**

You may have these down pat and know what you should be doing, but it doesn't hurt to repeat them here, they might just be a aide-mémoire, but it can also serve as a check list.

The obvious thing first....

Hold your camera steady. Also a bit obvious, but how do you do it ?

You must have a steady base, that is stand with your feet apart, you may be in a field and there is nothing to lean against, you could also kneel or even lie down, much like a sniper would do. What ever you do, you need to provide a solid base. What ever you do, don't shoot one handed, don't think that you can hold the camera (I'm talking about compact cameras that don't have a view finder here) at the end of your arms, I know that's where it should be, i.e. in your hand(s), but not at the end of out-stretched arms, where they are going to have about, and you won't get anything like a sharp image at 1/60th of a second, where you would have far better luck and technique in holding the camera closer to your body (this is where a view finder on the camera will help as it forces you to look though it and at the same time, you don't have out-stretched arms).

Control your breathing, again much like holding steady aim with a rifle, if your breathing is rapid and you have taken the advise above, where you are holding the camera close to your body, your arms may be tucked in and responding to your breathing, making the cameras aim, rise and fall.

You probably have a strap that your camera hangs from around your neck, you can take up the slack, by wrapping it around your wrist, and thereby making a more steady connection between you and the camera, better yet, arrange for the length to be adjusted so that when you raise the camera to your eye, the camera strap becomes taught.

And finally, with technique, press the shutter steadily, I remember with an old Cannon A1 that I had, it had two pressures, one to switch the meter on and a harder press, would fire the shutter, I am sure that with a bit of practice, you can find the point where it just fires and know how to **squeeze the shutter release**.

All the above are about technique, camera settings will also have a bearing on the sharpness of the final image, the following will depend on your subject and all may or may not be appropriate, desirable, or feasible.

The lens aperture will have a direct impact on the sharpness of the final image. It has to be set so there is enough DOF (Depth of field), to get into focus what you want in focus, i.e. if you are talking a portrait, you need the f-stop to be set so that ALL of the face is in focus. I might suggest that you don't want the end of the nose in focus, and the ears or even the eyes just slightly out of focus.

It may be that, if you are taking a shot of a length of sea wall for instance and you are looking along it, should you want to isolate the ice-cream van from the rest of the scene, you need a more restrictive DOF.

The shutter has to be appropriate to the length of the lens that you are using, and there is a simple way that you can set this, for instance if you are using a 50mm lens, the all things being equal, i.e. its not excessively windy, your SLOWEST shutter speed is 1/60th of a second. If you are using a longer lens, for instance a 300mm lens your SLOWEST would be at a bear minimum, 1/250th of a second and possibly 1/500th. The long lens is acting in the same way as a compact camera at the end of your out-stretched arms.

There are lenses and cameras that have electronics and mechanics that allow for these limits to be broken and they do help in most situations, but some cases where the motion, i.e. the camera movement, is too great, these will fail and it is good to know where these are and what to do if they do.

Take lots of pictures, if you have a subject that is static and you have the time, its a good idea to take more than one, if not 5 or more, that way, you should have at least one that is sharper than the others, this is especially true of a place where you might not visit again, or is difficult or expensive to get to.

If you can **find a support of some kind**, use it, lean against a wall, prop yourself next to a tree, a lamp-post, whatever, find some support. Take a tripod If possible, though be aware of obstructing a walk-way, the police might not be very accommodating.

If you can use a tripod, you can then employ a self timer, so that you aren't touching the camera when the shutter goes off, or a cable or wireless shutter release. If your camera has a mirror up facility, where you can move the mirror out of the path of the light, this can also help. If its windy when you are using a tripod, you might want to find a sheltered spot or you may have to shield the camera+tripod from the wind with your body.