Focus On Photography

Margaret Leveson
Iowa State College

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SPRING brings the camera fans back into circulation, loaded for bear or any other subject that might chance to come within range. And this army of lens lovers is a formidable one, growing in size and expenditures year by year.

Photography has become one of America's favorite hobbies, with innumerable antics recorded on black pages of snapshot albums in almost all families.

This is one of the best uses for photography—just taking pictures of your friends and family. But to get the greatest value from this hobby, your pictures must be good enough to be recognizable after a few years.

You can take better pictures with far less film if you make each picture really count. And this is easy to do—just keep a few points in mind and check them off before you flick that shutter.

The greatest errors in amateur photography are in focus, composition and lighting. The degree of error depends on two things: the limitations of your camera and your own mistakes.

Focus on

By Margaret Leveson

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Photography

about 6 inches in front of the other, pointing her toes. A broad face looks more attractive from a three-quarters view, too. And a long nose looks shorter if the camera is aimed from slightly below the face-level. If your subject is seated, she'll look more graceful with her legs extended and together, rather than tucked under her.

When you take group pictures, you have much more trouble. Most of the group will want to stand stiffly at attention and grin into the lens. At this point, call forth your greatest diplomacy and try to get the group arranged naturally. Some will be sitting, perhaps; one or two standing. Try to hold the size of the group down—five to seven is a good number. When you photograph two people together, keep the head of one somewhat below that of the other for good picture interest.

POINT NO. 2: CHECK YOUR COMPOSITION FOR INTEREST AND ACCURACY

For lighting, most amateurs depend on sunshine. If you have a flash attachment to your camera, you have probably learned the special instructions it carries with it. But sunlight, the easiest light source, is not so completely adaptable as artificial light. You can take excellent landscapes and portraits in sunlight, but you do have to adapt your technique to the light source.

The first problem you'll meet will be shadows. Since sunlight comes from overhead, length of noses, hollows under the eyes, and chin shadows may be overemphasized. Partial sunlight or open shade (in the shadow of a tree or building, but with clear sky overhead) usually gives the best portraits, if your camera has a lens opening as large as f/11. If you have a box camera with no lens adjustment, you're limited to open sunlight. In this case, your model will have to stand so that sunlight falls directly on her face. Backlighting is not successful, unless you have a camera with variable lens aperture, a lens shade, and you have a good deal of know-how. For safety's sake, keep direct light on the side you're photographing. In strong light, where excessive shadows appear in the subject's face, have a helper use a sheet of white cardboard to reflect light into the shadows. And don't try to make your model look into the sun. That will mean squinting and wrinkles almost every time.

POINT NO. 3: CHECK YOUR LIGHTING FOR ACCENT AND ADEQUACY

Special effects in pictures usually take special equipment: for good clouds, you need a yellow filter, for example. A variation in type of film makes a difference: verichrome or orthochrome film is not sensitive to red, and all red looks black in the finished print; panchromatic film is sensitive to all colors, and is better, therefore, for portraits. Extra fast, or super XX film, lets you take pictures with somewhat less light than you need for regular film.

Contest-winning pictures have been taken with box cameras. If you own such a camera, you can take outstanding pictures if you keep within your camera's limits. You have a simple-to-operate but excellent machine: use it in proper light for stationary objects, and don't attempt moving things or close-ups or pictures in bad light. There's no hobby more rewarding than photography, and a small investment—well used—can bring huge dividends in pleasure, recreation and a life-long record of good times.

Learn to look at the background as well as your subject. This will help you avoid such photographic catastrophes as a telephone wire growing out of a pretty girl's head or a shingle roof neatly framing your best beau's butch. Holding your camera straight, posing your subjects naturally and checking on focus will avoid pictures like the one on the right and give results to be proud of as in the picture on the left.