

## A Good Picture

(derived from an essay by Robert Kozek, used with permission)

A good picture is one that evokes a message and/or evokes a feeling. In order to achieve this, a subject of the picture must always be clear, in-focus, and properly exposed.

A CLEAR SUBJECT is one that clearly stands out from the rest of the image. It is the person, thing, place, plant or animal that is the reason why the image was created.

IN-FOCUS means that the subject of the image is not blurry. The two most common causes for having a picture out of focus are:

(1) The camera was focused on the wrong subject. If you focused on the wrong subject then you need to retake the picture and pay attention to which area of the image the camera is focused on. Adjust the settings of the camera or move the camera around until it picks the correct area.

(2) The camera moved while the image was being captured, making the whole image is blurry. If this is the case there is probably not a lot of light available, which means the camera's shutter has to be open for a longer time in order to take the picture. It's difficult to hold a camera absolutely still long enough to get a picture when there's not a lot of light. To remedy this, use a tripod for the camera or wait until the lighting conditions have improved.

A PROPERLY EXPOSED image is one where the subject of the picture is neither too bright nor too dark. The image should show how the subject looks in real life. The best remedy for images that are consistently coming out too dark or too bright is to adjust the EXPOSURE COMPENSATION in your camera. If the subject is too dark, adjust the EC to +1. Then retry. If the subject, is too bright adjust the EC to -1, and retry. Continue to adjust as necessary to reach the desired result.

If you have a clear subject, in focus and with proper exposure, you will have a good picture.

However, a good picture is not the same thing as a picture which communicates a certain message, or story. Everybody sees the world in a special unique way, and in this lies the ability to tell a story. Therefore, the story is dependent on choices made by the photographer.

There are a set of common tools that are used by photographers to help convey their story or to create certain feelings and emotions in the pictures they capture. The most important of these tools are COMPOSITION, COLOR, LIGHT, and PHOTOGRAPHER & SUBJECT RELATIONSHIP.

COMPOSITION (also sometimes referred to as the "EYE") has these elements:

**PERSPECTIVE:** the angle or the viewpoint from which the photograph is captured. It can be low to the ground or from the roof of a building. It is the photographer's choice.

**DEPTH OF FIELD:** the amount of the image that is in focus. You can have an image where everything is focus, from whatever is closest to the photograph to whatever is farthest away (most common for landscape images). Or you can have only a small portion of the image in

focus (most common when taking a portrait of a person). The photographer controls by adjusting the camera settings from PORTRAITURE (for short focus) or LANDSCAPE (for long focus).

The photographer can also control depth of field by changing the distance between him and his subject. The closer he get to his subject, the shorter the depth of field (more like a portrait). The farther away from the subject, the greater the depth of field (more like a landscape).

**USE OF FOREGROUND:** If the SUBJECT of the photograph is in the background, the photographer should make sure that there is nothing in the foreground that will cause a distraction and therefore take attention away from the SUBJECT. Instead, the photographer should include elements in the foreground that will strengthen the image or add support to the SUBJECT.

**USE OF THE BACKGROUND:** If the SUBJECT of the photograph is in the foreground, the photographer should make sure that there is nothing in the background that will cause a distraction and therefore take attention away from the SUBJECT. Instead, the photographer should include any elements in the background that will strengthen the image or add support to the SUBJECT.

**COLOR:** Color can bring life to a photograph, it can set a certain mood, or it can be a distraction in it self. The photographer has the option to include certain colors that help bring emphasis to the subject matter. Or the photographer can choose to use black & white to tell a story to avoid any distractions that are possible due to colors that will distract from the SUBJECT of the photograph.

**LIGHT** has many aspects elements to it, and it can get very complicated. But here are two essential concepts:

**SOFT LIGHT** is produced when light is diffused. An example would be a cloudy day, or light from a window. With soft light, shadows have soft, not well defined edges. The image will not have as much contrast as with **HARD LIGHT**.

**HARD LIGHT** is light from a direct source that produces clearly defined, harsh shadows. **HARD LIGHT COULD** come from the sun on a clear day, or a small, bright spotlight. Hard light adds contrast to an image and will tend to make a photograph more dramatic.

**PHOTOGRAPHER & SUBJECT RELATIONSHIP** is difficult to define and explain. Essentially, it is the photographer's ability to make use of any or all of the elements mentioned above to attempt to create an emotion in the audience about the SUBJECT. It is the photographer's feelings about, approach to, and attitude toward the SUBJECT. These things will influence the photographer's choices of composition, color and lighting, and they will influence which of several possible versions of an image the photographer chooses for display to an audience. In these ways, these things affect the message or story that the final photograph carries, and the effect of the photograph on its audience.