

Free Gray/Color Checker Card Inside!

Alan Hess

Exposure

Digital Field Guide



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Table of Contents

[Chapter 1: Understanding Exposure](#)

[Defining Exposure](#)

[Stop](#)

[Exposure value](#)

[Equivalent Exposures](#)

[Exposure Modes](#)

[Program auto mode](#)

[Shutter speed priority mode](#)

[Aperture priority mode](#)

[Manual mode](#)

[Metering Light](#)

[Camera Metering Modes](#)

[Spot metering](#)

[Center-weighted metering](#)

[Scene metering](#)

[Exposure Compensation](#)

[Exposure Compensation versus Flash Compensation](#)

[Bracketing Your Exposures](#)

[Using the Histogram](#)

[Using the Clipping Information](#)

[File Formats](#)

[RAW](#)

[TIFF](#)

[JPEG](#)

[Chapter 2: Working with Light](#)

[Direction of Light](#)

[Front lighting](#)

[Back lighting](#)

[Overhead lighting](#)

[Side lighting](#)

[Intensity of Light](#)

[Color of Light](#)

[Color temperature](#)

[White balance](#)

[Daylight](#)

[Tungsten or incandescent light](#)

[Fluorescent light](#)

[Using a Flash](#)

[Fill light](#)

[Color gels](#)

[Chapter 3: Shutter Speed](#)

[Controlling the Shutter Speed](#)

[Camera controls](#)

[When Shutter Speed Is More Important Than Aperture](#)

Freezing the Action

Superfast shutter speeds

Very fast shutter speeds

Fast shutter speeds

Normal shutter speeds

Slow shutter speeds

Very slow shutter speeds

Panning

Chapter 4: Aperture

Controlling the Aperture

Understanding f-stops

Camera controls

Program auto mode

Aperture priority mode

Manual mode

Depth of Field

Defining the depth of field

Controlling the depth of field

Shallow depth of field

Middle depth of field

Deep depth of field

Aperture versus Shutter Speed

Understanding Lens Limitations

Lens speeds

Diffraction

Variable and constant aperture lenses

[Macro lenses, aperture, and depth of field](#)

[Chapter 5: ISO](#)

[Understanding ISO and Light Sensitivity](#)

[Digital Noise](#)

[High ISO Noise Reduction](#)

[Noise reduction through exposure](#)

[Noise reduction using software or camera settings](#)

[Using a Higher ISO](#)

[Chapter 6: Event Photography](#)

[Exposure Considerations](#)

[Shooting outdoors](#)

[Shooting inside](#)

[Checking the exposure](#)

[Concert Photography](#)

[The Right Equipment for the Job](#)

[Camera](#)

[Lenses](#)

[Accessories](#)

[Shooting Events](#)

[Shooting Tips](#)

[Chapter 7: Portrait Photography](#)

[Exposure Considerations](#)

[Aperture](#)

[Shutter speed](#)

[Considering Lighting and Location](#)

[Indoors](#)

[Outdoors](#)

[Portrait tones](#)

[Working with People](#)

[Children](#)

[Groups](#)

[The Right Equipment for the Job](#)

[Lenses](#)

[Lights](#)

[Other accessories](#)

[Shooting Portraits](#)

[Shooting Tips](#)

[Chapter 8: Landscape and Nature Photography](#)

[Exposure Considerations](#)

[When to shoot](#)

[Shoot in Aperture priority mode](#)

[Metering modes](#)

[Shooting snow](#)

[Checking the exposure](#)

[The Right Equipment for the Job](#)

[Lenses](#)

[Accessories](#)

[Macro Nature Photography](#)

[Panoramic Photography](#)

[Shooting Landscapes and Nature Photographs](#)

[Shooting Tips](#)

Chapter 9: Night and Low-Light Photography

Exposure Considerations

Long shutter speeds

Wide open aperture

High ISO

The Right Equipment for the Job

Cameras and lenses

Accessories

Photographing Light Trails and Fireworks

Photographing Silhouettes

Sunrise and Sunset Photography

Shooting at Night and in Low Light

Shooting Tips

Chapter 10: Sports and Action Photography

Exposure Considerations

Shooting outside during the day

Shooting inside

Shooting outside at night

The Right Equipment for the Job

Cameras

Lenses

Accessories

Shooting Sports and Action Photographs

Get into position

Figure out which mode to use

[Get good non-action action shots](#)

[Shooting Tips](#)

[Chapter 11: Wedding Photography](#)

[Exposure Considerations](#)

[The bride and groom](#)

[Shooting inside](#)

[Exposing for movement](#)

[Evaluating exposure](#)

[The Right Equipment for the Job](#)

[Camera bodies](#)

[Lenses](#)

[Dedicated flash](#)

[Accessories](#)

[Shooting a Wedding](#)

[Getting ready for the bride](#)

[Getting ready for the groom](#)

[The ceremony](#)

[The formal portraits](#)

[The reception](#)

[Shooting Tips](#)

[Chapter 12: Wildlife and Animal Photography](#)

[Exposure Consideration](#)

[Using Aperture priority mode](#)

[Picking the right metering mode](#)

[The Right Equipment for the Job](#)

[Cameras](#)

[Lenses](#)

[Accessories](#)

[Pet Photography](#)

[Shooting Wildlife and Animal Photographs](#)

[Shooting Tips](#)

[Chapter 13: Creative Exposure](#)

[Exposure Considerations](#)

[High exposure](#)

[Underexposure](#)

[Using Exposure to Create a Mood](#)

[Using ISO Noise Creatively](#)

[Appendix A: Software](#)

[Adobe Camera Raw](#)

[Photoshop](#)

[Library module](#)

[Develop module](#)

[Appendix B:How to Use the Gray Card and Color Checker](#)

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About the Author

Alan Hess is a San Diego based commercial photographer specializing in concert and event based photography, but has photographed everything from portraits to products. He is the author of two previous Digital Field Guides, the Sony Alpha DSLR-A700 Digital Field Guide and the Sony Alpha DSLR-A200 Digital Field Guide.

His concert and backstage images have appeared in numerous online and print publications and have been used for promotional purposes and music packaging.

He is a member of the National Press Photographers Association and the National Association of Photoshop Professionals and Nikon Professional Services.

Alan is a key contributor to the Lexar Pro Photographer Web site and has written articles on concert photography and technology. Alan has taught concert photography at Photoshop World and has taught photography, digital photography workflow using Adobe Bridge and Adobe Photoshop Lightroom at Essy's Studio in San Diego.

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For Nadra

Introduction

This Digital Field Guide is not camera specific or even brand specific, it is all about exposure, but what does that actually mean? Exposure is a very simple concept — allow the light sensitive sensor (film) to be exposed to the light that is reflected from the scene you want to capture. That's the basics of taking a photograph. When you press the shutter release the camera opens the shutter and the light travels through the lens and is allowed to reach that sensor and you have a photograph.

As photographers you get to control the amount of light that reaches the sensor by controlling how long the shutter is open and how big a hole the light enters through. You also get to decide how much the signal from the sensor is amplified and it is those decisions that are the essence to taking photographs and getting a proper exposure.

I get a lot of questions about photography both through my blog at www.alanhessphotography.com and in person when out photographing. Most of the time the questions are about how I managed to capture a certain image or what settings I use for my photos. The answer is pretty simple: I use the best exposure settings for the situation.

In this book, I start by covering exactly what an exposure is and what controls you have to adjust it. It explains how your camera measures light and what each of the settings mean, as well as which of the metering modes works best for different situations. It also covers the exposure modes found on most cameras and when the best time to use them is.

Next up is all about light. Because photography is capturing light, it is important to understand the direction, color, and intensity of light in any scene. It is only after you can see and understand the light, that you can really go about capturing it. Shutter speed, aperture, and ISO are also covered in detail. Each of these sections not only cover the controls you have at your disposal, but the pros and cons of each one.

After the generalities of shutter speed, aperture and light are covered, it is time to get a little more specific starting with event photography, which includes one of my favorite photographic subjects — concert photography. I also cover outdoor events, indoor events, and those that take place all day long. You will learn about the exposure considerations and what can be done to get the best images possible.

Next is all about shooting people, from individual to group portraits, from shooting outside to dealing with studio lights. How to deal with the exposure problems that arise when shooting portraits is covered along with the best ways to check your exposures are all covered here.

Shooting landscapes and nature is also covered — from the exposure considerations when shooting landscapes and nature photography to controlling the depth of field to make sure that the whole landscape is in focus and even what the best times to shoot landscapes are.

Low light and night photography is up next. By definition, low light and night photography deals with photography when there is minimal light. Photographing light trails and fire works as well as how to shoot those beautiful sunrises and sunsets are all covered, as well as

a look at the best way to shoot a silhouette, a technique that will let you use silhouettes creatively from now on.

While you normally use long shutter speeds when photographing in lower light, when it comes to sports and action photography, the opposite is often true. You use very short shutter speeds to freeze the action. How fast of a shutter speed is needed and what are the consequences are covered in this chapter. It doesn't matter if you are shooting your kids playing a soccer game or if you are on the sidelines of a high school, college, or professional football game, the basics are the same.

Everybody loves a wedding; it is a time of joy and happiness...unless you are photographing the event. Wedding photography can be a very stressful experience for a photographer, with only one chance to get it right. Weddings can also be a real challenge when it comes to getting proper exposures due to the traditional bright white dress and dark tuxedos. In this chapter I cover the problems and the solutions with shooting weddings that will hopefully help if you ever find yourself as the wedding photographer.

Wildlife and animal photography is another favorite to photograph. It can range from photographing pets to taking a trip to the local zoo or an animal park, but the skills you need to get great shots are the same.

Finally, you get a look at some creative exposure options — the different ways to achieve your artistic vision and some fun ways to experiment during the image creation.

Because this book is all about digital photography I also spend some time at the end covering some of the software options and a bit about what can be done in

post processing to adjust your exposure. However, even with the advances in software and the amazing things that can be done on a computer these days, remember it is still best to get the exposure right in the camera first.

This Digital Field Guide includes a new feature; a gray card/color checker that can be removed and used to help you get true and accurate colors in your images.

One quick note: this book is made specifically to go with you. It isn't some tabletop tome that can't leave the house, its made to go in your camera bag, so dog ear the pages, use a highlighter to underline the parts that are important to you, but the main thing is for you to take the book with you, use it as a guide when out shooting. And, if you really love the book and don't want to get it worn and torn, I have no problem with you buying two.

Chapter 1:

Understanding Exposure

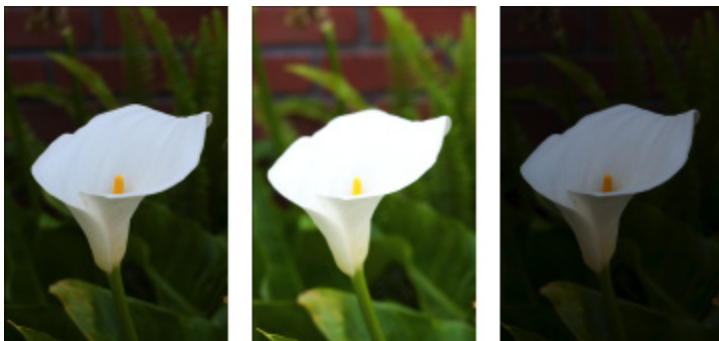
Photography is the art of capturing light. You use your camera's lens to focus the light and the sensor to record the light, creating an exposure. As a photographer, your job is to decide how much light the sensor is allowed to record, how long the shutter is opened, and how big the opening is in the lens to let in light. You also get to decide how sensitive the sensor is to light. All these factors let you control the exposure. You need to understand the exposure modes and light metering to help get the proper exposures and how to use the histogram to check your exposures. Picking the right file type to store your image is also important because it can make a big difference if you need to adjust the exposure in post processing.



Using the proper settings enabled me to capture the light cat in the darker shadows without losing detail in either. 1/320 second, f/4.5, ISO 800.

Defining Exposure

The basic definition of exposure is very simple: The exposure is the amount of light that is allowed to reach the sensor in your camera to create a photograph. The amount of light that reaches the sensor is controlled by two main factors: the length of time the shutter is open (shutter speed) and the size of the opening through which it flows (aperture). A third factor — ISO — changes the sensitivity of the camera's sensor to light, which can be used to modify the exposure. The question becomes how much light is needed to create the look you want. No matter what settings you use, the sensor in your camera records the light being reflected at the camera. If too much light reaches the sensor, the image is overexposed or too bright; if too little light reaches the sensor, the image is underexposed or too dark. The goal is to let through enough light so the bright areas in your image are not too bright and the dark areas in your image are not too dark.



1.1 These three images were taken around the same time. The left image shows the calla lily in good exposure (1/160 second, f/6.3, ISO 200), while the middle and right images show the same flower when overexposed and underexposed. Notice the lack of detail in the light areas when overexposed and the lack of detail in the dark areas when underexposed.

When discussing exposure, a set of standard terms are used that help you to define the exposure. Shutter speed is described using time, aperture is described using size, and ISO has a standard numerical value. You also need to understand what happens when you change the shutter speed, aperture, or ISO and the relationship among these different exposure factors. The basic unit used when describing this relationship is called a stop.



You can also use the Exposure Value to describe the settings used to achieve a proper exposure.

Stop

A stop is the change between one shutter speed and the next, where the change is exactly double or half the original shutter speed. The difference between a 1-second and 2-second shutter speed is one stop because the amount of light that is let in during the 2-second shutter speed is twice as much as the light let in by the 1-second shutter speed. There is a stop difference between 1/60 second and 1/30 second as well since 1/60 second is half as much as 1/30 and lets in half as much light. A stop also describes the change in aperture where the new aperture is double or half the current aperture and it is the change in ISO between one value and a value that is either double or half the current ISO.

Each time you double or halve the ISO, it changes the sensitivity by one stop. For example, the difference between ISO 200 and ISO 400 is one stop, with the image taken at ISO 400 needing half as much light as an image taken at ISO 200 because the sensor is twice as sensitive to light.

A one-stop difference in the shutter speed, aperture, or ISO will either double or halve the exposure, but most

modern cameras allow you to set the shutter speed, aperture, and ISO in 1/2 or 1/3 stop increments allowing for more choices.

You may hear a photographer say things like opening up a stop or stopping down. Opening up a stop means increasing the light entering the camera by a stop by increasing the size of the aperture, While stopping down is just the opposite: it is used to describe decreasing the amount of light reaching the sensor by decreasing the size of the aperture,. So, don't let the fancy talk confuse you; using the word stop when talking about photography is just a way to describe adjusting the exposure.

Exposure value

Your camera indicates what the built-in light meter has determined to be the correct exposure. Cameras use a numerical value called the exposure value or EV to describe the exposure. The EV for a correctly exposed image has the value of 0. Negative values are scenes that the built-in light meter has determined are underexposed and need more light, while positive values are scenes that the built-in light meter has determined are overexposed and need less light. The values are measured in stops. When you look through your camera's viewfinder, you see a readout showing the exposure value.

When you use the Program auto exposure mode, Shutter speed priority mode and Aperture priority mode have an EV of 0. When the camera is set to Manual mode, you can use EV to determine if the settings you have entered are close to what the camera considers the correct

exposure. You can adjust your settings according to what the EV shows.

For example, if the EV value shows a -1, then according to the camera you are letting in too much light and overexposing the image by one stop. You can correct this by increasing the shutter speed by one stop, stopping down the aperture by one stop, or reducing the ISO by one stop.

Equivalent Exposures

Equivalent exposures are an important part of getting the best exposure for each situation. The idea behind equivalent exposures is that different combinations of shutter speed, aperture settings, and ISOs can create the same exposure. This is because the three work together to create an exposure. For example, if you use a fast shutter speed and a wide aperture, you can get the same exposure with a slower shutter speed and narrower aperture.



1.2 This flower was shot at 1/400 second, f/1.8, ISO 200.



1.3 This flower was shot at 1/50 second, f/5.6, ISO 200.

Think of the sensor in your camera as a glass and the light coming in as water. You want to get the perfect amount of water in the glass, so you turn on the faucet and the water flows into it. If the faucet is opened all the way, it can stay open for a short period of time to get the desired amount of water. If the faucet is opened only partway, it must be open for a much longer period of time for the same amount of water to fill the glass.

The easiest way to explain equivalent exposures is to show how it works. Say that you have an exposure setting of ISO 100 with a shutter speed of 1/125 second and an f-stop of f/16. If you increase the shutter speed by one stop, which halves the time the shutter is open, you must double the size of the aperture. So, for an ISO of 100 and a shutter speed of 1/250 second, the f-stop must be f/8. This works in reverse as well; if you leave the shutter open for twice as long, 1/60 second, you need to make the aperture smaller, letting in half as much light, which is f/32.



1.4 This flower was shot at 1/500 second, f/3.5, ISO 800.



1.5 This flower was shot at 1/3 second, f/22, ISO 200.

As you can see, the flower in figures 1.2, 1.3, 1.4 and 1.5 looks the same in all four images because the exposure is the same for all four images, yet the images are not identical. If you look at the background, it changes drastically from being completely out of focus to being easily identifiable depending on the combination of shutter speed, aperture and ISO used.

Exposure Modes

Today's digital cameras come with a fully automatic mode, and most consumer cameras have scene modes to help you get the right exposure under specific circumstances. For example, both the Nikon D90 and the Canon EOS Rebel T1i have five scene modes: portrait, landscape, close-up, sports, and night portrait. These scene modes help photographers get the best results in specific situations, but the other exposure modes give you the maximum control over your images, and control is what it is all about. The modes I focus on in this book are Program auto mode, Shutter speed priority mode, Aperture priority mode, and Manual mode.

Program auto mode

When your camera is set to Program auto mode, the camera decides the shutter speed and aperture, and in some cases the ISO. But what separates this from a full auto mode is your ability as the photographer to adjust the shutter speed or the aperture and let the camera adjust accordingly to make a proper exposure. This is a great mode to learn with because the camera is basically picking the starting point for both the shutter speed and aperture.

