

# Essential Camera Skills

## Doing things in the right order



**Step 1: SUBJECT** You can't do anything else until you know what you are going to be taking a photo of, so Subject is always the first on your list. Make sure your subject is strong enough to attract and hold attention.

**Step 2: VISUALISATION** The key thing is that you're able to visualise how you want the photo to be, as without this, you are essentially relying on luck, which is probably not the best approach. Try to imagine how your subject will sit in its surroundings, what depth of field you will want, and crucially, what light will best suit the scene.

**Step 3: VIEWPOINT** This is one of the most important yet underrated steps in the taking of any photo. By "viewpoint", we mean the position of the camera. Think in three dimensions: working out the optimum angle, distance and height of the camera to your subject. You cannot change viewpoint once the photo has been taken so invest as much time into this as possible.

**Step 4: COMPOSITION** Now we have the camera in the right place, we can make other compositional decisions such as what focal length to use and where in the frame we place our subject. Considering things like the Rule of Thirds, Leading Lines, Framing and Balance are all important, but remember that rules are there to be broken, and if you break them intentionally then it's probably the right decision.

**Step 5: FOCUS** There are many different methods of focusing, with each one having its advantages in certain situations. More important than choosing the right focus mode and method is knowing where to focus. Almost all the time, this should be on your subject, but there are some rare exceptions.

**Step 6: DEPTH OF FIELD** Now that we have our subject in focus, we need to decide whether we want to render all the other areas in the scene to appear either sharp or out of focus. We do this with depth of field, which is influenced by focal length and distance to subject, but controlled by aperture. As we know, aperture also influences exposure, which is why you can't get your exposure right until after you have sorted out your depth of field.

**Step 7: FILTERS** This step might not be relevant, but if you are using filters such as a polariser or a neutral density, then now is the time to fit them, as these will affect the exposure which is...

**Step 8: EXPOSURE** Three controls influence exposure: ISO, Aperture and Exposure Time, which form the three sides of the Exposure Triangle. As we've already set our aperture to control the depth of field, we are left with just ISO and Exposure Time. If our subject or the camera are not moving, then Exposure Time will have no influence on the image, so it makes sense to use this one to control the exposure.

**Step 9: AWARENESS** We're pretty much all set up now and ready to take the shot, so it's a good time to become aware of our surroundings. In a landscape environment, pay attention to the light and the direction of clouds and try to predict what is likely to happen in the coming seconds and minutes so you can optimise when you take the photo.

**Step 10: FINAL CHECKS** Now is a good time to do a few housekeeping checks. Is the front of the lens clean? Are you shooting the intended file format (eg RAW or Jpeg)? Is the sun likely to be causing flare? The list of possible things which can go wrong is quite long, but now is the time to try to eliminate them before they happen.