

Centenary Photography Competition - Top Tips for a Great Shot

Are you interested in entering our Centenary Photography Competition but not quite how to create the perfect shot? Don't panic! With a little bit of know-how, you'll be taking award-winning photographs in no time, no matter what sort of camera you use.

One of our competition judges, photographer Suzie Williams, who is based in Oxfordshire, shares her top tips for great shots! You can see examples of her work at www.suziewilliamsphotography.com

Choosing your subject - think carefully about what you want to photograph. Do you want to document a guiding event? Do you want to create a still-life shot and set up a few guiding things to 'tell a story' for the centenary or do you want to photograph people and friends? Whatever you choose, plan your shot; work out what you'll need to create it, where you need to be and how you see the final photograph. With a picture in your mind's eye of your final result, it will be easier to get that all-important winning shot

Composition - once you've chosen your subject, think about how you're going to arrange it in your photograph, good composition is the key to a good photograph. As you look through your viewfinder, divide the frame up into thirds (vertically and horizontally) and aim to position the most interesting part of your shot in one of the left, right, top or bottom thirds. This will make a more interesting shot than if you plonked it right in the centre. So if you're shooting a landscape, try positioning the horizon in the top third of your frame - that way you'll highlight the landscape, not the sky. If you're shooting a sunset however, position the horizon in the bottom third of your frame and you'll instantly put the spotlight on the beautiful colours of a setting sun as it will now take up two-thirds of your final image. If you're photographing one of your friends, try putting them to the left or right of your shot instead of centering them. If it's a building, why not try an interesting angle by tilting your camera through 45 degrees? In short, a little bit of creative thinking goes a long way.

Light - you've chosen your subject, you've composed your shot, but the light is poor. Think again! Lighting is crucial to a good photograph. It can highlight texture, add drama and throw up interesting shadows. But get the lighting wrong and your shot will be ruined. A few simple tips: make sure your subject is well-lit but not overly bright as too much light will wash out all the detail. The ideal light for a natural-looking portrait shot is bright but overcast. If it is very bright, look for a shady area with the sun behind you and remember, direct, overhead sunlight will create strong shadows so be wary of photographing people in such conditions - they will often look like they have panda eyes because of the way the shadows will fall across their faces!

Focus - no matter what sort of camera you use, ensuring your subject matter is in focus is really important, and not difficult to do! Decide what you want to focus on and hone in on this as you take your shot. Most digital cameras with fixed lenses (and all digital SLR cameras) have focus assist buttons that tell you when your subject matter is in focus - usually with a beep - before you take the shot.

And finally, good luck. Have fun with your photography and experiment with different subjects and styles until you find the shot you love!