

# Tips for better photos

A photograph can be a great tool for communicating the MDC message. Done well, photos grab your attention and convey lots of information in a brief glance.

Now that there are more high-quality digital cameras available to field staff, we will be turning to you more often to provide photos for Department publications. There are many more great photo opportunities than our staff photographers can attend.

**Here are some of the situations we're looking for:**

- **Photos of people with bagged game or fish.**
- **Photos of women, minorities and youth** in the above or otherwise engaged in the acts of hunting, fishing or other outdoor activities.

## Tips for taking the best pictures possible

**1. Use a camera with 5 megapixels or higher.**

**2. Always use the highest resolution available on the camera, even if you have to use more or bigger storage cards.**

Doing so results in a better picture, and it allows us to use the picture in a wider variety of places, such as the *Conservationist* Magazine. It also allows us to print the picture as big as necessary.

PowerPoint presentations don't need files this big. But it is always better to have a high-resolution picture to start out with, then save a low-resolution copy for your presentations.

Higher resolution photos take up more space on the storage card. Often cameras get set at lower resolutions in order to fit more pictures on the card. The preferred solution is to get more or bigger storage cards.



*If image resolution is too low, the picture will print poorly.*



*An image taken at the highest resolution available will look much better.*

**3. Use the highest quality JPEG setting.**

Most cameras have JPEG settings ranging from high quality/big file, to low quality/small file.



*An image taken at a low quality JPEG setting will print poorly.*



*An image taken at a high quality setting will look much better.*

#### 4. Get closer and fill the frame.

Simply moving closer to the subject can improve many images. You can do this by zooming in with the lens or physically moving closer to your subject. Include only what is important to the image in the frame.

Keep in mind that “what is important” can be interpreted different ways. When you are shooting a landscape, you are including a lot of stuff, but you are making a decision that all of that stuff is important to the image. However, be discriminating. Really think about what is important. **If in doubt, take it out!** Before taking the picture, look around the edges of the frame and make sure nothing is there that doesn't belong.



*This picture is somewhat loose and the subject is not very prominent in the frame. Too much is included within the picture.*



*While it is good to show a subject in its environment, you don't have to show a lot of it to make the point. This picture allows the subject to be more prominent in the frame while still showing enough of the surroundings to give context.*



*This image focuses on the subjects fairly well, but there is a lot of background clutter and things that aren't really important that distract the eye.*



*By getting tighter on the subjects, we make them much more prominent, and the picture is much more eye catching. A decision was made to not include the teacher in this shot. For the sake of image effectiveness, including the teacher is not essential.*

#### 5. Do not use digital zoom.

Most cameras have optical zoom and digital zoom. Optical zoom is what the lens does. Digital zoom is basically the camera cropping the image. This sacrifices image quality. If you run out of optical zoom, try to move closer to you subject instead of using digital zoom.

## 6. Pay attention to what's in the background.

While including background elements that add context and depth to your image are good, the background can very easily become cluttered and distracting. Consider moving your subject or getting a different angle. Often, simply getting a higher angle improves things immensely.



*This photo has a very cluttered background.*



*Moving the subject to a different location with a cleaner background results in a much more pleasing photo. It is important to make sure there is some distance between the subject and the background so the background goes sufficiently out of focus. Zooming the lens in closer helps in this respect as well.*



*There are a lot of distracting background elements in this photo.*



*Simply getting a different angle on the subject makes a huge difference. The background still provides context, but is very pleasing.*



*While we're at it, consider the visual impact of getting even closer to the subject.*

## 7. Use the “fill flash” function.

It may seem counterintuitive, but the best time to use flash is on a sunny day. Where there is sun, there are shadows, and cameras have a tendency to make shadows even darker than they really are.

Most cameras these days have some sort of fill flash function, although they may call it different things: fill flash, daylight balanced flash, forced flash, or flash on (as opposed to automatic.) This setting uses just enough flash to fill in the shadow so we can see detail, but not so much that it obliterates the sense of a shadow altogether. Figure out how to use this setting on your camera, then use it any time the sun is out. If you leave your camera on automatic, the flash may not fire.



*While some people may like the moody feel of this image, it will not print very well, as shadows get even darker on press.*



*Using fill flash allows us to see detail, without losing the pleasing effect of the back lighting.*

## 8. Consider the direction and quality of ambient light.

While you can't control the movement of the sun across the sky, you can use that movement to your advantage. One myth that needs to be dispelled right now: to take better pictures put the sun at your back. This is bad advice. If the sun is at your back, then that means it is in your subject's eyes. This can cause them to squint. It also creates harsh and flat light. It is much better to have the light coming from the side or even somewhat behind your subject. This will create a more pleasing photo. Fill flash will keep the shadows from getting too dark.

The quality of light is just as important as the direction of light. Morning and evening light are much more pleasing than mid-day. The light at the ends of the day is more directional, softer and has a warmer tone. Whenever possible, concentrate your shooting time into these prime hours.



*The light in this photo is somewhat harsh, and the direction causes shadows from elements outside the frame to fall on the subject in a distracting way.*



*The light in this photo is from the side and creates a much more pleasing and visually interesting image.*

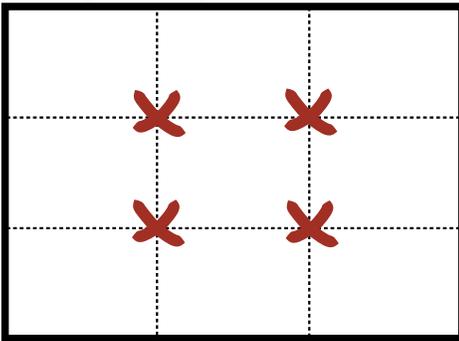


*Shooting at mid-day is sometimes necessary, but the resulting image will have harsh highlights and distracting shadows.*



*If you can delay your photography until later in the day, or shoot in the morning, the rewards will be evident in the warm tones and directional light that creates pleasing highlights and shadows.*

### 9. Use good composition.



Just as an artist must decide where to put things on his canvas, a photographer needs to decide how to arrange the elements in the frame. There are lots of ways to do this, but one way that is overused is placing the subject dead center of the picture. Fortunately somebody invented a rule to help guide us in composition. It is called the "rule of thirds": if you divide the frame into thirds, vertically and horizontally, you should place your subject or focal point at the intersection of two of the lines.



*By using the rule of thirds, your picture becomes more dynamic, giving the subject a relationship to its surroundings and giving the action a place to go. The picture will also work better within a page layout.*



*While this photo may not seem like an obvious use of the rule of thirds, it is. The eyes are the most important part of a portrait, so they become the focal point. You will notice that the eyes in this photo are indeed near the intersections of our rule of thirds lines. And the second most important element, the fish, also falls at an intersection.*

## 10. Photograph action.

While portraits and posed images have their place, there isn't much that can beat the visual impact of an active moment. Whenever possible, look for opportunities to photograph action as it happens.



*It probably is a good idea to take a picture of this guy smiling and holding up his fish, because that kind of image has a purpose. But the visual impact and storytelling potential of a shot of this guy hauling his catch into the boat will get people's attention.*