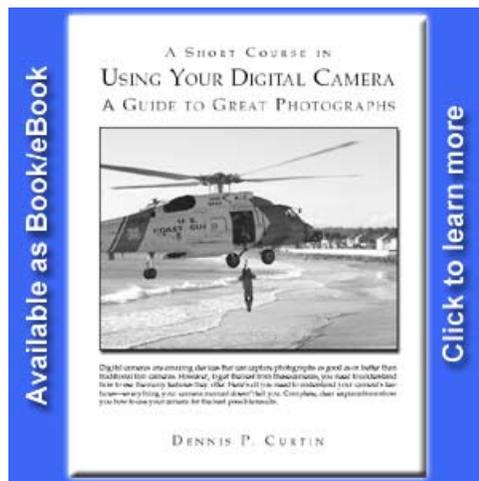


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## A Short Course in Using Your Digital Camera

### 9. Seeing Creative Images



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Pictures don't always have to be sharp to be good, perfect exposures don't always give the best results, camera angles don't always have to be the same. Digital photography is so inexpensive you shouldn't feel the need to get every shot perfect. It's likely your photographs won't be interesting if you don't take chances and explore new approaches. When you find a situation that catches you eye, shoot it from a variety of positions, if you have a zoom lens use it, try using exposure compensation. Keep experimenting and trying new techniques, occasionally do things "wrong" deliberately. Those results that appear interesting can be applied in other situations. Eventually you'll find a distinctive personal style that allows you to convey the world to others from your own unique viewpoint.

One mistake many photographers make is to think they have to go to unique places to get unique photographs. This leads you to ignore the possibilities nearby and at-hand. Because we admire the work that Edward Weston did at Point Lobos, or that Ansel Adams did at Yosemite, we often think we have to go to Point Lobos or Yosemite. What's often forgotten is that these people were shooting in their own back yards. They knew the area and its light intimately. They took photographs of the same places over and over again from different vantage points and under different lighting to build their skills. And compared to André Kertész in his later years, their backyards were huge. Kertész did some wonderful work when he was too old to go out by shooting out of his New York apartment building. His photos of the street below and the park across from his building show what can be done from a fixed point with a creative imagination. To build your skills, photograph the same things over and over again as the light changes. Try different points of view, and different angles and compositions. You have no excuse to not do this because unlike these earlier photographers, you're not spending money on film when you try new things.

 [Play with the Horizon Line](#)

When photographing out of doors, one of the key elements in many images is the horizon line and where you place it in the image. Some photographers like to follow "rules" and place the horizon line so it's one-third up from the bottom of the image. This rule may give interesting images but you'll do better trying different things. Despite what some people believe, there are no rules in photography. If there were, photography would be a lot easier than it really is.



*The low horizon line emphasizes the vast spaces and the low ceiling for the mist.*

*The higher horizon line emphasizes the foreground.*



*Setting the horizon line in the middle of the image gives equal emphasis to the sky and the water.*

*Setting the turkey at the base of the frame changes the image a lot from what it would be if he'd been centered.*



*Setting the horizon line at the bottom edge of the image makes the sky the dominant part of the image and conveys a feeling of vastness.*

### **Look for Unusual Atmospheric**

In the rising or fading light at dawn and dusk you can often see unusual lighting in the sky. One approach to photographing these scenes is to place something interesting in the foreground. Also, bracket your exposure so you have a variety of images to choose from.



*The moon reflects in the water while a soon to rise sun illuminates and overhead cloud.*



*The light from a soon to rise sun creates a fan shape above the horizon.*



*Known as a "pillar" this vertical shaft of light above the setting sun are caused by ice crystals in the air.*



*Here, the last of the lifting morning fog makes the image by providing that extra element that creates a mood.*

### Explore Reflections

Reflections can add a lot of interest to a photo and they are everywhere. Day and night, they are on the water, in windows, and on any shiny reflective surface.



*A lighthouse light is reflected in the smooth harbor water on a quiet windless morning.*



*Taken from almost the same spot as the photo to the left, here the sky is pink but the light again reflects from the lighthouse.*



*A small bird is reflected in the quiet water.*



*A tree reflects from a mirrored California window.*



*Shooting down the side of a New England fishing boat captures the ocean's reflections in the boat's windows.*



*The grill in an old car at a car show reflects the crowd.*



*With the light illuminating a flag reflects in the window of an old nearby building, a store window becomes alive with interest.*



*The rising sun reflects off a seaside window throwing a bright reflection on the harbor water.*

### ▲ Play with Shadows

Bright sunny days may look beautiful, but they aren't the best days for photography. The hard, direct light casts black shadows everywhere. But shadows are interesting, you just have to think about them and where they fall. Too often we just notice the bright part of the subject when composing pictures.



*There's not a lot to see on the surface at the Arizona Titan Missile Museum. In desperation, I used the shadows of a crowd of visitors to get a more dramatic image.*



*Here a small cloud casts a shadow over just the U.S. Constitution while everything else remains in bright sunlight. It gives the old warship a more threatening look.*



*By shooting down and not including the people's heads, the shadows play a more important role in the image.*

### ▲ Play with Patterns

Patterns are everywhere, you just have to practice noticing them. Some have a center of interest, many just an unbroken rhythm that makes them interesting.



*Salt meadow grass found in salt mashes forms long waves.*



*A maple leaf lies on the grass on the day of the first frost.*



*The seeds in a sunflower form radiating patterns.*



*The morning sun forms shadows on the melting ice of a Rocky Mountain lake.*



*The paint peels from an old sign.*



*A flower blossom is a rich source of both color and patterns.*



*Fallen maple leaves.*



*The field of mustard, the row of houses, and the row of trees all form a very regular pattern in the image.*



*This straight line of gulls added to the photo's interest.*



*A newly mown lawn in front of a castle in England. Click the picture to enlarge it and you'll see the lawn is set up for croquette.* *Ripples in the sand when the tide goes out look like miniature sand dunes.*

### Look for the Unusual

I'm one of those photographers who love kitsch but it's getting harder and harder to find. However, if you keep your eyes open for humorous or interesting images, you'll be surprised at what you might find. You just have to be ready to capture them when you see them..



*A father peers through the transparent side of an inflatable whale while the kids pose for a photo.*



*Not a great image, but the idea behind it is interesting. The town of Gas, Kansas has painted their water tower to look something like a gas can and labeled it such.*



*A truck parked alongside a rural California road added a lot to the surrounding landscape.*



*Two guys attending an art lecture found no place else to sit in the standing-room only crowd.*



*A horse skeleton outside of a rock shop. I wonder if it attracts people with money to spend?*

### ▲ Shoot from Unexpected Places or Angles

Most people shoot straight ahead from a standing position. That's why so many photographs look alike. Try shooting up, shooting down, getting on your knees, climbing tall buildings. Do anything you can to change the angle of view. Shoot through glass or screens, experiment with every possible aspect.



*Small boats form a path for the tall ships visiting Boston. I happened to be flying over in an airliner and shot through the window.*



*Shooting up causes vertical lines to converge in the distance.*



*A small town baseball diamond shot through the grandstand screen.*



*The crooked branches give an eerie feeling to the Eiffel Tower.*



*By just moving to the side a little I was able to line up the gull with the rising sun.*



*Shooting these campers through the mesh "window" on their tent created a very soft image.*



*Girl scouts take a break after a hot Memorial Day parade through town.*

Be sure you don't let glass between you and an interesting subject stop you from shooting. You don't have to open a window, just shoot right through the glass.



*Using flash, this shark swimming past an aquarium window is frozen in place.*



*These colorful anemones were photographed through the glass at an aquarium.*



*Shooting through the back window of one of the cog railroad cars on Mt. Washington gave an interesting image of the engine and another car.*

### ▲ **And Yes, Even Sex**

Probably not what you were expecting, but sex nonetheless. To capture these kinds of scenes you have to carry your camera with you a lot or really be in tune with the natural cycle so you can anticipate when things are happening.



*Here, beetles (left), ladybugs (center), and horseshoe crabs (right) do their thing.*

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