



Photobucket's

44 Quick Tips to Take Great Pictures With a Smartphone

Hey you, yeah, you, aspiring photographer. Maybe you can't afford a big old DSLR yet, but let's talk about the powerhouse of a camera you probably already have at your disposal – the one in your pocket. Smartphones offer a lot of bang for your photography buck, and they are the perfect tool to test your creativity while creating some stunning images.

There's a lot to master when it comes to capturing and composing some real photographic beauty with your smartphone, but these 44 tips will help you hone your skills and take your smartphone photography to the next level.

We'll Cover:

- Principles of Photography
- Subject Matter
- Lighting
- Smartphone Power Secrets
- Getting Creative

Principles of Photography

1. Rule of thirds

This is, perhaps, the golden rule of photography. The rule of thirds states that, in any given photo frame, there is a three-by-three grid. You have a top third, a middle third, and a bottom third as well as a left third, a center third, and a right third. These thirds are the key to keeping your compositions interesting and avoiding the bad habit of centering all your subjects within your frames.

2. Keep it simple

Beautiful photography doesn't have to be complex. In fact, keeping your compositions simple is often the best way to create imagery that strikes the viewer. Being able to do simple things extremely well is a photographic principle that will serve you well even when you tackle more complex compositions.

3. Ensure a clean shot

Keeping an eye on the background is one thing, but one of the most important things you can do before you take the picture is to check the perimeters of the shot. Often, things creep into the edges without you realizing while you were focused on the main portion of the photo. Even a barely-there intrusion on the edges of your shot can hurt the final product.

4. Shoot low to high

This isn't the way we look at the world most often. Think about the wonder you feel when you are forced to look up at something to take in its beauty. Shooting from a low-to-high angle allows for a grandiose effect on most shots, as well as a shift in perspective for the viewer —something that always elicits interest.

5. Don't forget depth

Dimension is what makes a photograph come to life – showing depth adds dimension and makes your 2-D photograph seem almost 3-D. This is achieved by using foreground objects (those closest to you and the camera) to frame the subject. By doing this, and keeping the subject further back, you create depth that makes the viewer look a little harder, and sets a much more descriptive stage.

6. Lead the eye

Depth is part of the equation here, but there are several other ways to lead the eye of your viewer in your photography. Use lines – guard rails, tree lines, horizons, lane markers in the road – they can all help lead the eye toward or away from your subject, and in doing so, help create a rich photograph that engages the viewer's minds.

7. Symmetry, symmetry, symmetry

Remember when we talked about patterns? Symmetry comes into play with those, but you can use symmetry in more instances than simple pattern identification. Symmetry exists in reflections, in faces, in everyday objects. And symmetry is pleasing to the human eye, which makes it a very useful tool to employ in your photography.

8. Employ graphic design basics

Graphic design and photography have a lot of things in common – they are both visual arts, after all, aiming to captivate the viewer with clean lines, intriguing subject matter, and creative looks at life and everyday objects. Consider employing principles like alignment (diagonal alignment is a great one), hierarchy (re: depth and subject focus), and balance (the rule of thirds helps with this) in your photography and see the difference it makes.

9. Consider your compositions

You don't have to control everything within a shot in order to control how the shot turns out. There are many ways in which you can consider your compositions before you take the photo. Consider the lighting, your subject, whether you need to be nearer or further, your surroundings. Move what you can if it better the shot, and be cognizant of all angles available to you. Create a checklist of things to double-check before taking the shot.

Subject Matter

10. Be picky

Sometimes when you're starting out with photography, you get an urge to photograph anything and everything. While we say go ahead and follow that urge for a little while, you'll quickly realize that, unfortunately, not everything photographs well. It's ok to be selective about what you want to shoot, in fact, getting more selective will really only increase your skills and the quality of photograph you're able to capture.

11. Macro details add interest

Of course, you can't get truly macro with your smartphone photography without an add-on lens, but you can achieve some pretty cool close-up stuff by getting as close to your subject as possible without losing focus. This naturally creates a shallow depth of field and highlights details that may otherwise get lost.

12. Not all nature is worth photographing

An addendum to the first tip in this section. Nature is beautiful, but it's not all photogenic. Ok, so, most of it IS, but resist the urge to take a bunch of wide shots with too many layers, too much texture – the result is a photograph that's way too busy. Instead, choose truly breathtaking scenery and try and have a solid foreground and background, with clear separation between the two.

13. Limit subjects

In order to keep your compositions clean, limit the number of subjects in your photos. Choose one or two things you want to be the center of attention (not necessarily in the center of the shot) and focus on making those subjects shine.

14. Check your (photo) surroundings

We've all seen it – the photo where the bulk of the shot is gorgeous but there's a messy background cluttering it up, or something unexpected that was so close to being out of frame, if only the photographer had paid better attention. Be the photographer that pays attention. Check the full frame before you take the shot, make sure everything is precisely where you want it to be.

15. Create scale

If you want to give a sense of how big or small something is in your photo, the best way to achieve it is to give it something to compare to. If you're taking photos of caves or cool rock formations, try putting a person in the frame (creatively) to showcase the magnitude of the formation. Or use two things within your frame to highlight the enormity or the smallness of the other.

16. Add visual interest with patterns

Training your eye to see patterns will help you create stunning compositions time and time again. Things in a row, things lined up diagonally, patterns that occur in nature (leaves or tree limbs or mountain ranges, to name a few). Capture these things with the sole focus on the pattern itself and see the impact it has.

17. Consider what your subject requires

Not all subjects need the same photographic treatment, so don't expect to be able to take photos in the same position, the same way, every time. For example, portraits often turn out better with soft lighting, creating a more even field across the face. Before you click the shutter, consider if a small tweak might take your shot to the next level.

18. Tell a story

Think about the photographs you've seen that cause an immediate reaction within you. Chances are, in some way, shape, or form, they were telling a story. If you're photographing humans, try and capture real emotion. If you're photographing wildlife, try and include context without losing focus. It's all about using the space within your frame to explain the moment in a way that will help communicate its meaning to the viewer. Keep this in mind as you create your compositions.

19. Think it through

Extra consideration is the thing that can take a photograph from meh to good and from good to great. Thinking through what you're doing before you do it will be one of the most powerful tools in your photography arsenal.

shadows.

Lighting

20. Natural lighting always wins

Indoor and studio lighting certainly serves its purpose, but nothing beats the natural light you get outside. Any time you can take your photography sessions outdoors, do so. There are nuances to this tip, and we'll get into those below.

21. Avoid being backlit

Unless you're doing silhouette work, or you have advanced shooting skills, it's generally best to avoid your light source being behind your subject. It makes exposure harder to manage and can make focusing in on your subject tricky.

22. Try different angles with the same lighting

Lighting is one of those things that shifts in your composition every time you do. It's an interesting experiment to focus on a single subject and take photos from as many different angles as possible with a single light source. When doing this, focus not just on where the light hits, but also the length and richness of your shadows.

23. Move around

This applies to angles as well as depth. You're not going to get the most creative shot possible, or one of the highest quality, if you aren't willing to play with the light available to you. Especially if you're outside, there are reflections, sunspots, shadows, and more available for your photographing purposes. Move around in your space and see how many different lighting scenarios you can discover.

24. Halo lights are great for detail

Artificial lighting can be fantastic for highlighting detail in portraits. The best part? They make portable ones for your phone if you're looking to play with this technique. If you've ever wanted to seriously up your selfie game, a halo light will do the trick in a big way.

25. Get it golden

Ahh, the golden hour. It's that glorious time of day just before sunset where things look, well, golden. It's some of the best lighting out there for dramatic photos and stunning hues, but it can be a little tricky to work with. Give yourself some time so you can try different angles until you find what works best. But once you've taken a few well-composed golden light shots, you'll find yourself chasing that hour time and time again.

26. Learn to love the clouds

It might sound a little counterintuitive, but a cloudy day is truly a photographer's best friend. A blanket of clouds diffuse the light so it is more even, allowing you to craft the composition you have in mind without having to fight harsh glares or dark shadows. If you're out and about and looking to capture some Insta-worthy snaps, consider an overcast afternoon your lucky day.

27. Work together

Sometimes two is just better than one. If you're in a low-light situation with a friend when you spot the perfect shot, recruit your buddy's phone flashlight to help illuminate the subject so you can get the photo!

28. Get appy

While we don't recommend relying heavily on apps to up your photography game (it's always better to put in the footwork to learn the skills the right way), one of the greatest parts of working with a smartphone as your camera is that you have the benefit of post-shoot apps that allow you to tweak color profiles, exposures, and contrasts without having to spend forever trying to get the shot juuuuust right out in the field. We recommend Snapseed, VSCO, and Studio.

29. Silhouette it up

Like we mentioned above, there is a time and place to let the backlight life shine, and silhouette work is the place! Silhouettes make for cool effects and dramatic shots, but make sure your backlight is in the right place and your exposure is low enough if you're gonna take this style on. Otherwise you risk your silhouettes being less than fully in shadow, which can ruin the effect you're going for. Stark contrast is the name of the game with silhouette work, so try and choose a composition that supports that difference in foreground, subject, and background.

Smartphone Power Secrets

30. HDR helps exposure

If you've clicked off that HDR feature because you think it takes too many pictures, or takes too long to snap your shot, you may want to reconsider. HDR helps with exposure by taking a photo at the exposure immediately available, then taking one lower, one higher, and combining them to create the perfect exposure. It's a great help in situations where the light is a little too low or a little too bright, but the shot is otherwise spot on.

31. Keep it clean

This one probably goes without saying, but when you're living your everyday life it can be easy enough to forget – clean the lenses! And clean them regularly! Keeping those photographic bits free and clear of dirt and debris will keep your photos clear and crisp.

32. Digital zoom exists, but that doesn't mean you should use it

Undeniably, there are instances where digital zoom comes in handy, but it should be a last resort only. Don't let it become your replacement for moving your body to get the perfect shot. Physically getting closer is always the better option, as it will allow the phone's best camera settings to shine.

33. The photo doesn't take until you take your finger off the shutter

Less of a trick, more of a reminder – but the photo doesn't actually take until you take your finger off the shutter button. If you hold down, you'll either end up with a burst or might miss the moment. It requires a little bit of anticipation in everyday life, being ready for the shot a split second before it's exactly what you want, but knowing this helps you be prepared.

Getting Creative

34. Lens attachments can come in handy

If you're serious about your smartphone photography, you may want to look into attachments. Things like macro lenses or wide lens attachments can help take your photos to the next level and beyond the smartphone's capabilities without investing in a full DSLR.

35. Learn to see things differently

This one just takes time, and consistent effort. Training your photographic eye isn't easy, but it gets much easier with practice. Learn to see things differently, don't be afraid to get a little weird in order to get the shot. When you can see the world in a series of possibilities, angles, and beautiful details that you may have previously been missing, your photography will start to show this unique perspective.

36. Sink into the shadows

Shadows may not always be the best thing for your photos, but learning to play with them in a way that is artistic and helps you understand the relationship between light and shadows, as well as the importance of contrast, will take your photography to the next level.

37. Layer it up

When you can create interesting relationships between fore, mid, and background subjects, you create layers that add depth, and force viewers to think harder about what you're trying to accomplish. And any photo that gets the viewers thinking is a good one!

38. Get reflective

We touched upon this briefly earlier, but reflections can be a huge asset in your photography. Not only are they often beautiful, but their natural symmetry is pleasing to the eye and they allow you to flip perspective in a different way.

39. Rethink perspective

Along with learning to see the world in a different way, rethinking your perspective with every shot is a great way to hone your creative skills and unlock a new level of creativity. After you take the shot you had originally planned, consider if there's a way you can flip the perspective – for you as a photographer and for the viewers who will eventually see your work – to make things a little more interesting or unexpected.

40. Apply filters (sparingly)

We always advocate for learning how to take great photos without the help of post-production help first, but just as most great photographers earn their unique stamp via editing, you can create a unique look that unifies your photography with the use of apps and filters if you use them in a way that enhances what you captured rather than trying to mask any mistakes. Choose filters that brighten the bold colors in your shots, or highlight the contrast between the subject and its background, or that help balance the exposure just a little better. Elevate your shot rather than trying to mute it so it looks like all the other photos on social media out there.

41. Play with stark contrast

The relationship between light and dark is one of the most powerful tools in a photographer's kit, and the only way to master it is to play with all ends of the spectrum. Where taking photos on an overcast day allows you to keep a pretty even exposure with less contrast, taking photos when the sun is at its highest, or when it is directly behind your subject will give greater contrast. Taking photos half in-shadow and half out will take this even further. Put yourself in situations where the contrast is naturally stark and see what you can do!

42. Take risks

No one ever became great at something by playing it safe the whole time. Some of the best shots you'll get will come from getting out of your photographic comfort zone and stepping into uncharted territory. The more risks you take with your photography, the better you'll get, and the more risks you'll be able to take. Your comfort zone can always be pushed, expanded, and pushed again – lean into that and watch your photos evolve quickly.

43. Let color lead the way

Color is the lifeblood of a lot of modern photography. Telling color stories by grouping similar colors together or creating color palettes that pop is an important part of the work you'll do. Whether these color palettes are ones you find occurring naturally in the world around you or ones you create by arranging a flat lay or other composition, playing with color and letting it lead the overall mood of your shots is a great way to expand your understanding of color relationships and how they play a part in the final outcome of your shoots.

Bonus Tip

44. Backup, backup, backup!

Whether you're a beginner or a pro, it's important that your photos are stored in multiple locations. Losing all your pictures because your phone fell in the lake or your laptop crashed can be a heartbreaking experience. Keeping backups on external hard drives or in cloud storage services like [photobucket.com](https://www.photobucket.com) can prevent that loss and save time and money in using recovery services. As an extra perk, it also makes it easy to share your creative work with friends and family.

Becoming a better photographer is all about starting with the basics and building from there. With these tips under your belt, you can use that powerful device in your pocket to become an impressive photographer. And when it comes time to store that glorious gallery you've created, we've got you covered with powerful storage and intuitive organization.