

Class Notes

iPhone Photography Essentials

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Introduction

Thanks for taking the time to enroll in the iPhone Photography Essentials course! This document contains detailed notes from each lesson of the course. This was designed to

allow you to watch the class without taking notes, as well as to better retain the information you learn in the course content.

Notes are broken down by each lesson. You can choose to follow along by reading the notes as you watch the course, or just simply refer back to the notes after you watch the course in order to better understand the information.

This document is free to use and only serves to help make the course a better learning experience for you, the eager student! :)

Class Notes

Broken down by each video

1. Introduction

- The Introduction of this course outlines the basics of what the course covers
- A note on the class project:
 - i. The class project for this course is to capture 3-5 photos with your iPhone. Once you've captured these photos, return to the course and upload the project into the "Course Project" Section of the class.

2. Which iPhone Model is Best?

- In this lesson we discuss which iPhone Model is best for iPhone Photography. Typically, newer models have better features. However, all iPhones on the market these days have the ability to capture beautiful photos.
- If you have a newer iPhone, that's great! If not, don't worry. You can still take awesome photos with your older model.
- If you don't have an iPhone at all, that's okay. This course still has plenty of information that's relevant to you.

3. Overview of the iPhone Cameras Most Important Functions

- In this lesson we cover the actual camera app and it's most important functions.
- First off, the native iPhone camera app is awesome. You don't need to use a third party app to take awesome photos on your iPhone. If you want to dive through the app store and try some of them out you totally can, there's some cool toys in there. But ultimately, the native app is the best for a few reasons: it's fast, it gives you more than enough creative control, and it's easily accessed.
- **You can open the camera by:**
 1. Tapping the camera app in the phone
 2. Holding camera icon on bottom right hand corner of lock screen
 3. Swiping from right to left on lock screen.
- You can capture a photo in the camera app by tapping the shutter button or using your volume buttons.
- So right above the shutter button on your camera you might see a little icon that says 1x, or you might see 3 little icons (.5x and a 2x) like mine. These numbers refer to the lenses on your phone. You can tap on them to switch between the lenses.
- If you only have 1 lens on your phone, you won't see any icon here. If you aren't sure how many lenses you have, just turn the phone over the look.

- Older phones have just 1x or 2x lenses, and the new higher model phones have 2 or 3. The lenses offer different focal lengths, and allow you to zoom in and out. For example, the 2x lens is really zoomed in, and the .5x lens is zoomed out.
- The 1x lens sits perfectly in the middle of the two and is great for most shots. In this example we can see the difference between the 3 focal lengths.
- Below the lens selection are the "Photo Modes" which you can see are "photo, Portrait, video, etc". There's only 2 that are important for iPhone photography - the normal "Photo mode" and "Portrait Mode".
- The normal "Photo mode" is the default mode that we are going to be using more of the time.
- Portrait mode is a smart mode that uses AI to blur the area around your main subject giving it a really cool professional look. Not all iPhone models have portrait mode, but most models do nowadays. If you don't have portrait mode don't worry, like I said before the normal photo mode is what we are going to be using most of the time.
- There is also a Panorama mode which lets us capture really cool long shots. I'll also be showing you how to use this feature later on in the active section of the course (B-ROLL), so for now I will just point it out.
- Now you can swipe up in the camera to reveal an array of different settings and interesting tools. In this section you can control aspect ratio, exposure, photo profiles, as well enable features like HDR, Live Photo, flash, and self timer.

4. iPhone Camera Setup

- Now that we have a pretty good understanding of the iPhone camera, let's jump into the setup.

- The Phone cameras are pretty solid out of the box and to be honest there isn't much you need to do to capture great photos. However there are 3 things that are worth noting to ensure you capture great photos.

1. Live Photo Preserve Setting ON

- The first thing we are going to do is turn the live photo preserve setting off. This will allow us to enable or disable live photos and the iPhone will remember our setting even if we close the app.
- Live photos are essentially a 3 second video instead of a photo. They are cool to use if you're shooting moving subjects and you'll never have to worry about someone blinking again because you can just go in and choose a different frame
- However, they take up twice the space as a regular photo. If you're worried about space on your iPhone, I recommend turning this off.
- In order to only have to disable this feature once instead of every-time you open the app, simply turn off the Live Photo preserve setting. You can do this by navigating to settings > Camera > Preserve Settings > and on the bottom make sure "Live Photo" is enabled.

2. Smart/Auto HDR OFF (iPhones after Xs have Smart HDR).

- The next feature we need to disable Smart HDR for newer iPhones, also called Auto HDR for older iPhones. Before I get into why we should disable this, let me first explain what HDR is.
- HDR stands for High Dynamic Range. Dynamic range is the difference between the brightest and darkest areas of our image. A photo with high dynamic range will maintain a lot of detail in the shadows and in the highlights, while a photo with low dynamic range means the highlights might be overly bright and blown out, and the shadows might appear to just be black.

- Usually, the camera doesn't need to use HDR to capture well exposed images. But when faced with a high contrast scene, it might struggle to capture all the details in the shadows and highlights.
- When HDR is enabled on the iPhone, the phone captures multiple images at different exposures and blends them together, allowing for a photo that has a very high dynamic range. Often, this looks really good. Especially for certain scenes like landscapes where you want to have as much color and detail as possible.
- Most of the time I shoot with HDR enabled. But, there are times when I like to turn it off. For example, when capturing silhouettes, or when we want to maintain the high contrast of a scene. By disabling smart HDR/Auto HDR, we now have the choice to enable or disable HDR within the actual iPhone app. If we don't disable this, the iPhone will use it's judgement to choose and we won't be able to decide with each photo.
- On the newer iPhones, I think Smart HDR works quite well, but on older iPhones it's not as reliable so it's important that we have the option to enable or disable it with every shot.
- To turn off Smart/Auto HDR simply navigate Settings > Camera > and toggle Smart/Auto HDR on or off.
- Now when you open the app you can simply tap to enable or disable HDR with every shot. I recommend going outside and experimenting with the HDR feature. Take 2 photos of the same subject with HDR enabled and disabled, and look at the differences. Some shots look great with HDR enabled, while others look great with it disabled.

3. Grid mode on.

- This is crucial for composition - and also for getting neutral horizons. We will discuss this later on in the course in the composition section,

but for now I highly recommend enabling it in the settings app!

4. **Clean your lens!**

- One last pro tip before shooting: Clean your lens! Use your shirt or a microfiber cloth on your lens before shooting.
- If you don't, your image quality could be negatively affected.

5. **Focusing and Setting Exposure**

- Besides creative choices, **focus and exposure** are the two things we need to make sure looks good in camera before we capture a photo.
- **Focus** is basically the part of your image that appears sharp and "in-focus". If your photo is out of focus, it will be blurry. When you take a photo with your phone, you want to make sure you are focusing on the most important part of your image. This might be the face of a person, it could be a plate of food, maybe a mountain, etc. It could be anything, whatever you think the most important part of the image is.
- The iPhone actually has an amazing **auto-focus** feature. You don't even need to do anything most of the time except open the camera app, point your phone at your subject and take a photo.
- However, if you're shooting something close up - what we call macro photography - the iPhone might not focus on the correct spot, so you need to **manually focus**. To do this, all you need to do is tap on the part of the photo we want to be in focus, and the iPhone will auto-focus there.
- When you tap to focus, you might also notice a little sun symbol on the right of the box. This is the iPhone telling you that it's exposing your image for the area you just tapped. You can also hold your finger down and drag up or down to adjust the exposure of your image. Dragging up will increase the exposure, and dragging down will decrease the exposure.

- **Exposure** is essentially how bright or how dark our photo is based on how much light is entering our camera. A photo that appears too bright has too much light entering the camera, we call this overexposed. A photo that looks dark means the camera doesn't have enough light entering the camera, and we call this underexposed. There isn't necessarily a right or wrong with exposure. Some photos look awesome dark, and some look great bright. This is very much a stylistic choice.
- The iPhone also has a great **auto-exposure** feature and most of the time we don't need to adjust our exposure at all. However, the tap and drag up or down feature is great if you want to focus on one part of the image, but exposure for something in the back of the image.
- The **AE/AF Lock** feature (auto exposure, auto focus lock) can be used by tapping and holding on part of the image you want to be in focus. The camera will lock focus on that part of the image so you can recompose your shot without the focus point changing. Very useful. You can see how I use it in this scene to lock focus on the main subject (the coffee cup), and then recompose to capture other things within the scene.

6. The Creative Side of Photography

- Understanding how the camera works (covered in the last section of the course) is essential for capturing good images. However, it's the creative side of photography that will help you stand out as a photographer.
- The next few lessons cover the more creative side of photography. We will discuss topics like Lighting, Composition, and Storytelling, and how they all work together to create a beautiful image.

7. Lighting

- Cameras capture light, that's how an image is created.

- When it comes to understanding lighting, there are 3 main things you need to know about light: **the quality of the light source, the strength of the light source, and the direction of the light source.** If you can understand these 3 simple concepts of lighting, you're going to be well on your way to capturing beautiful images.
- **The quality of the light source** is exactly as it sounds. Not all light is created equal! Picture the lighting in an old public bathroom in New York city, then picture the sun. Both are light sources, but both are completely different. The sun is hands down the most beautiful light source we have available to us. We call light from the sun **natural light**, and it's amazing. I always recommend shooting with natural light, because it's the most pleasing light source to the human eye. If you're shooting outside, chances are you'll be shooting with light from the sun. If you're shooting something indoors, opt to shoot it near a window with natural light pouring in.
- Weather and the time of day greatly affects how natural light looks in our photos, or how strong that light source is.
- **Strength of light source** can be explained as **hard light** (for example bright sun) vs. **soft light** (the sun is being blocked by clouds in the sky, making it diffused and much softer).
- Hard light means the light source is much brighter or stronger. Think shooting in the middle of a sunny day. Hard light leads to dark shadows and bright highlights, resulting in a very high contrast scene. This looks cool, but it's actually difficult for the camera to capture this high of contrast. Soft light is typically much better for photography, especially for things like portraits. That's why photographers actually like to shoot on cloudy or overcast days.
- The best light of the day for photography is around sunrise and sunset, because the light is soft and beautiful! It also has a lovely golden color that really brings out the colors in your photos. I always recommend shooting at

sunrise or sunset because your photos will be much much better.

- The third factor is the **direction of the light source**, and this basically means where the sun is in accordance to your subject, and where the sun is in accordance to you. This is especially important when shooting around sunrise or sunset, because the sun is coming in at a horizontal angle. The angle of the sun in accordance to you can greatly effect the way your image looks.
- If you're taking a photo into the sun, or the sun behind your subject, this would result in a high contrast image. We call this a silhouette. If you shoot with the sun behind you, facing right into your subject, this might result in a flat image with everything well-exposed. Now if you shoot with the sun to the side of your subject, you get this really beautiful 3d look because you have shadows in your scene. I always look to shoot with the sun to the side of my subject, because it makes the scene look much more dynamic. Here are 3 photos shot at the same time, but from different directions. Notice how it greatly affects the way the image looks.
- Now if all of this sounds too complex for you, don't worry. As long as you're thinking about lighting, you're already miles ahead of everyone else! If there's one thing to take from this lesson, it's that the time of day is the most important for the outcome of your photo. That's why us landscape photographers wake up at 4 or 5am to go capture our photos.

8. Composition

- **Composition** is how you arrange the elements within your frame.
- Many types of compositions accepted. You will limit yourself creatively if you just focus on different structured compositions. Instead of teaching specific compositional techniques, I like to discuss 5 compositional concepts that will

help guide you going forward.

1. **Perspective** is how you orient yourself in accordance to your subject. You can adjust your perspective by moving closer/farther, up/down, and left/right. One of the biggest mistakes beginner photographers make is shooting everything from one perspective: eye level! By adjusting your perspective you can greatly change the outcome of a photo. Here's a few examples of popular perspectives and how they can change the way your subject is portrayed in the photo: worms eye view makes your subject look large/grand, birds eye view makes your subject look small, Straight on is a realistic depiction. When shooting, I like to constantly move around my subject looking for new and interesting perspectives. I recommend you try this as well, as it can greatly enhance your photo skills.
2. **Leading lines** are lines that naturally guide our eyes to our main subject, or to our focal point in an image. They really help create a cohesive photo and make it easy for our eyes to navigate an image. When shooting, try to find lines within your scene and use them to guide your subject's eye towards your main subject or to a different part of the scene that is interesting. Using this technique can greatly enhance the outcome of your photos.
3. **Rule of thirds.** The rule of thirds just allows us to look at our frame differently. To understand the rule of thirds, we divide our frame into thirds. That's why we enable the grid on our iPhone! The rule of thirds tells us that we should place our subjects where the lines intersect. This helps us understand we don't need to put our subject in the middle of the frame, and leads to a composition that is easier for the subjects eyes to navigate throughout.
4. **Framing** is when we use objects or structures within our scene to create a border or frame around our subject. This helps us focus on the main subject. Frames can really be anything at all (trees, man-made objects like doors and windows, other natural elements). A good way to add a frame to your scene

is to find objects around you and step behind them and use them as a frame. I'll often find some leaves to shoot through in order to add a frame to my scene. Doing this can also help add depth to the scene, which is the 5th compositional topic I want to discuss.

5. **Depth** helps us understand what's happening in a scene by giving us a better idea of how big and small things actually are. It just makes photos look more realistic, interesting, and dynamic. We achieve depth in our image by making sure we have a foreground, mid-ground, background. Foreground refers to things close to the camera, (like the grass in this scene here) the mid-ground is middle of the scene (like the river here), and background is the part of the scene that's further away (like the mountains here). By adding depth to your scene your photos will look much more pro. An easy way to get depth in your scene is to just lower yourself closer to the ground. You can use the ground as a foreground element to create depth in your scene, find something nearby you to step behind, just like you did with framing.

9. Storytelling

- The way a photo looks is important, but the most important factor of a good photo, above anything else at all, is the story that photo tells.
- The most famous photos of all time, in the history of photography, aren't famous because of their style or art. While those factors do play a role, those photos are famous because of the significance of the moments they captured.
- The story of a photo consists of many things. Subject matter or the moment in which that photo was taken is going to have the biggest impact on your scene. Subject matter is defined as the actual physical contents within your photo. So, a person for example, or a car, a book, a house, etc. Those are all forms of subject matter.

- Lighting, color, and composition can play a role in the story of a photo as well. A dark photo might elicit different emotions than a bright photo. A tight-cropped composition is different from a wide angle shot, and colors like red and orange elicit much different emotions than green or blue.
- Humans tell stories well. Including other humans in your photos is a great way to tell stories.
- You can also exclude certain things from your scene in order to create a sense of mystery in your scene. This will allow room for interpretation from your viewer, adding story to your scene.
- If you're even thinking about the story you're miles ahead of everyone else. Story is what makes great photographers great!

10. Do This to Become a Better Photographer

- Get out and shoot as much as you possibly can.
- Shoot anything at all. Don't confine yourself creatively. Stretch your horizons and try to photograph things you wouldn't usually photograph.
- Shoot and collaborate with others. A creative social environment is essential for creative growth.
- The most important factor of all - have fun with it.

11. Intro to Practical Lessons: Shooting in the field

- In this section of the course we will be shooting outside in a few scenes that not only highlight some really cool features of the iPhone, but also cover some of the other concepts we learned earlier.

12. Choosing the best lens for iPhone Photography

- Each lens of the iPhone has a different focal length.
- The .5x lens is ultra wide, the 1x lens is wide, and the 2x lens is telephoto (more zoomed in)
- The lens you choose greatly impacts your composition and depth. Shooting wide will result in more things in your composition, but will reduce depth. Shooting with the 2x lens will add more depth to your scene, but will eliminate some of the subject matter from the scene.
- Everytime you shoot, you need to decide what you want to include/exclude from your scene, and if you want to show depth or not.
- Experiment with all lenses on your phone, this is the best way to learn, and you'll also have multiple photos to choose from when you are editing later on.

13. How to Take Long Exposure Photos use Live Photo Mode

- Capturing long-exposure photos with live-photo mode is very easy!
- Your iPhone must be updated to the latest version in order to use this feature.
- Long exposure photos are photos with a long shutter speed that show movement in our scene.
- It's great for showing the movement of water. Moving water looks smooth and silky when shot with a long exposure.
- To capture a long exposure using live mode, simply capture a moving subject with live-photo mode enabled.
- Make sure you hold as still as possible for 1.5 seconds before and after capturing the photo.

- After capturing the photo, view it in the photos app. Swipe up on the photo and select “Long Exposure” under the effects tab.

14. The Power of Portrait Mode

- Portrait mode can be accessed by swiping right on your iPhone camera. This brings up portrait mode and will automatically switch you to the 2x lens. Portrait mode works best with the 2x lens, but some phones also allow you to use it with the 1x lens as well.
- Portrait mode is an incredible camera mode that blurs the background behind your main subject, giving your photos a very professional look.
- For portrait mode to work you need to be within 2-8 feet. If you're too far your iPhone will tell you to get closer. If you're too close your iPhone will tell you to move further away.
- The iPhone will automatically recognize human and animal subjects and focus there, but you can also manually focus by focus tapping like I showed you earlier in the course.
- Once the subject is in focus the "natural light icon" on the bottom will turn yellow, meaning you're ready to go. Then you just take the picture.
- Portrait mode comes with several “light-modes” that you can switch between to change the look of the portrait. I use natural light mode most of the time because I think it looks best, but there are also other light modes you can experiment with like studio light, contour light, and several variations of stage light which I don't really use. I just don't think they look great yet.
- The cool thing about these light modes is you can actually adjust them after you capture the photo, so I don't often worry about changing it while I am shooting. Natural light is best.

- There's also one more feature that can be adjusted before or after you take a photo, and that is the f/stop. The f/stop is your aperture which is the small opening in your lens.
- The smaller the aperture (such as f/1.4 or f/1.8, the more shallow DOF you have, meaning your range of focus is very small and the background will be more blurry.
- The larger the number, like f/8 or f/16, the more depth of field you have in your scene, which means your range of focus is large and the background will be more in focus.
- You can adjust this before or after shooting portrait mode. I like to adjust it after with the slider, it's a really cool feature that will allow you to get the most natural looking shots.
- Portrait mode can be used with other things too. I like to shoot food and other objects with portrait mode. However, it doesn't always work perfectly if you're shooting something other than a portrait, so that is worth noting. Nonetheless, I think it's worth experimenting with!

15. Documenting Places with Pano Mode

- Pano mode can be accessed by swiping right on your iPhone camera twice.
- The Pano mode is great for those that don't have an iPhone with a .5x ultra-wide lens. If you only have 1x lens and want to capture a large scene, simply use the Pano mode to capture a wide angle shot.
- To use pano mode, simply line up your shot, tap the shutter button, then slowly move the phone from start to finish before tapping the shutter button at the end of the movement. Keep the phone as steady as possible as you move.
- You can turn the phone to the side to capture vertical subjects.

- Pano mode is also great for just documenting places. I use it to document places I visit around the world in order to preserve some of the memories from there.

16. The Two Approaches to iPhone Editing

- **Option 1:** Quick filter editing apps like VSCO and the built in Photos app. Great for editing photos and quite easy to use.
- **Option 2:** Editing in Adobe Lightroom Mobile which gives you a ton of power over your photo.
- Both options are great, and I use both heavily. In the next two lessons I'll show you how I use each technique to edit beautiful images.

17. Quick and Efficient Editing Apps

- The built-in iPhone photo app is great because you can add filters to your photos and adjust basic adjustments like exposure, contrast, saturation, etc.
- VSCO is another great app that I have used for years. VSCO has hundreds of amazing filters you can add to your photos. It also gives you the ability to adjust basic adjustments. If you subscribe to the paid plan, you will get access to many more filters and cool editing features like HSL (hue, saturation, and luminance) sliders.

18. Editing in Adobe Lightroom

- Adobe Lightroom Mobile gives us a ton of control over editing our photos.
- It seems complicated, but by following a very simply editing progression we can get amazing looking edits with ease.
- The best editing progression for Lightroom Mobile is as follows
- **STEP 1:** Crop and straighten your photo in the "Crop" panel

- **STEP 2:** Navigate to the “Light” tab and create a basic S-curve using the curves feature. Then, adjust the basic light adjustments to your liking.
- **STEP 3:** Navigate to the “Color” tab and edit temperature, vibrance, and saturation. You can also use the HSL sliders to adjust each color independently. An amazing feature!
- **STEP 4:** Navigate to the “Effects” tab and edit the texture of the photo using the sliders. Typically, I don’t use this tab much. However, I do like to add a small amount of grain to my portraits.
- **STEP 5:** Navigate to the “Detail” tab and add sharpening if need be. Make sure you mask in your sharpening by tapping and holding on your photo while dragging the masking slider up. The sharpening is applied to all areas appearing white.
- **STEP 6:** Navigate to the “Selective” tab on the far left. Hit the plus sign and choose one of three selective adjustments: paint brush, radial filter, or graduated filter. These will allow you to edit specific parts of the image, instead of editing the entire image. This is a premium feature, but more than worth it if you really want to get the best edits possible.

19. Thank You!

My sincerest thank you for making it to the end of the course (and reading all of my notes too)! Students like you inspire me to teach, and give me the energy to wake up every morning to create meaningful content. When I say thank you, I truly mean it.

If you’d like to continue learning with me, feel free to check out some of the other resources on the next page. I’ll also add my social channels below so you can find me on other platforms.

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