

Landscape Photography
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I am going to cover two broad topics today that we all deal with in landscape photography. The first is composition. We can approach that largely as a point and shoot issue. The second is exposure. We will need to approach that largely as a manual settings issue.

Landscape Photography - Composition

Find a focal point - Mountain top pictures can be pretty boring. So can a foliage picture. Oftentimes, you need something of interest in the foreground ... a barn, horses, a single tree, a sign post.

Panoramas – Zoom out as far as possible. Get low and get close to something in the foreground. Rule of thirds. (Really helps to have a long depth of field ...f16 or more). You might need a tripod if shutter speed is slow. (Sedona)

Make it special – People in their environment ... like a hiker, not facing the camera ... facing sideways or facing what you see. Add action scenes, like the Westfield Wildwater Race.

The Rule of Thirds:

1. Generally, position your foreground subject lower left or lower right.
2. Ensure your horizon is level. Then position it ...
 - a. One third of the way up if you have a great sky.
 - b. Two thirds of the way up if the sky is dull or the foreground is more interesting.
 - c. Half way up for mirror images.

Fill the frame –Ensure that you are close enough to the subject that it will be easily seen. Not the concern it once was. Today's cameras have a lot of zoom built in. But don't get greedy. Leave room for cropping and matting.

Work the scene – Get the iconic shot (Portland Head Light, Yosemite Valley,) then go for a few close-ups or different angles that no one else has.

Plan your day –

1. Bright days - Get out early. The soft light of the morning reduces the contrast in a landscape scene. The highlights and shadows of the image will be better than what you get at midday.
2. Blue Sky – Nice to be there, but not the best photo op. Nothing special. Clouds make pictures special. No two are the same. Nice clouds will distinguish your photograph from any other.
3. Overcast days – Preferred by many photographers. Just don't include any sky. It will be stark white. So zoom in a little.
4. Rainy Days – Shoot small. Get closer to your subject. Colors will pop. Go find some pumpkins or a waterfall!

Printing – Print your favorites. Change them out every couple of months. Bigger is better.

Managing Exposure in Landscape Photography

The primary challenge is controlling a vast range of light in a single image.

The human eye does a far better job of handling the light than any camera in the world.

The challenge is greatest in bright sunshine. Your camera will assess the entire scene, determine the average brightness level and shoot the image to best capture those mid tones. As a result, the clouds and the sky are likely to be overexposed. They will be washed out. And, anything in the shadows is likely to be too dark.

There is very little you can do about this with point and shoot settings.

Solutions ...

Select your ISO, Aperture Setting and Shutter Speed. Or select one of them and let the camera pick the other two.

Get off the Auto and set your camera to:

- 1) Program Mode (P)
- 2) Aperture Priority (AV) or Shutter (TV) Priority
- 3) Manual (M)

Program mode (P)

The camera will still select the aperture and shutter speed. You can now select the ISO or leave it on Auto. However, Program Mode introduces three several advantages for managing exposure. And the last one is huge.

- 1) Focusing (AF point selection) – Focus on the Taj Mahal in the center, not the bush in the foreground.
- 2) Metering – Your camera may have three or four metering modes. It is generally set to Evaluative Metering. In this mode, the camera evaluates the entire scene and makes the settings so that the mid tones are properly exposed. But what happens if you have a white horse in a field, or a nice swan on a lake? Sorry swan. No feathers for you. You are getting blown out. Spot Metering is an option. It will allow you to point at the horse or the swan, depress the shutter half way, let the camera set, re-compose (if you need to) and finish the click.
- 3) Exposure Compensation – Before the camera selects the settings, you tell it to go a little dark or a little light. For most outdoor photography, you can safely set the exposure compensation to $-1/3$ (one click). It will reduce blowout of the clouds and retain their detail. It will make the sky a little deeper blue. And while it will make the things in the shadows a little darker, you probably will not care, and can always recover them with post processing.
- 4) Exposure Bracketing - Canon calls it Auto Exposure Bracketing. This is a big deal. You can set your camera to take a burst of three shots. One medium, one dark and one light. Just one click.

Small bracket – Set the AEB with one click. It will take the dark and light shots at $-1/3$ and $+1/3$. Go home, pick the one you like, and delete the other two. Easy.

You can also use exposure compensation and exposure bracketing together. If your compensation is set to $-1/3$, and you bracket by $1/3$ of an f stop, you will get $-1/3$, $-2/3$ and 0. Probably the best set of choices. If you make one change to your landscape photography, let it be bracketing your images.

Composite Images

Once you have taken a set of bracketed images, you open up a whole new world ... blending them together. This time, you will want to set your exposure bracketing differently:

Large bracket - Set the AEB with three clicks. It will take the dark and light shots at -1 and $+1$. This is quite a difference ... so much that you are unlikely to want the dark or light image on its own. But you might want parts of one and parts of the other. This is a huge, big deal. Combine them in one of three ways.

- a. Clone them – With your photo editing software, open the two images. Select the cloning tool. Select a spot on your source image. Got to that same spot on you target image and paint over it.
- b. Layer them – Open both images. Stack one on top of the other in layers. Add a layer mask on the top image and erase parts of the top image so the bottom image shows through. There are many controls on how to do this.
- c. HDR – Create a High Dynamic Range (HDR) composite image. Demo with Photomatix (**which images?**)

Summary

1. Use you point and shoot techniques with some new ideas about composition.
2. Move from Auto mode to Program mode and take advantage of focusing, metering, exposure compensation and exposure bracketing.
3. Spend \$39 on Photomatix and start creating HDR images.
4. Next steps: Using the aperture priority, shutter priority, and manual modes.

Aperture and Shutter Speed

In most landscape images, you want everything in focus. If your scene has subjects at different distances, you need an aperture that is small enough to create sufficient depth of field. If most everything is in the distance, you can go to a larger aperture (which will provide more shutter speed ... always a good thing).

Hand holding consideration – What is your focal length? If you are zooming in at 200 mm, then your shutter speed needs to be at least 1/200 of a second with a full frame camera. If you have a crop sensor, you need to shoot 50% faster ... at least 1/300. When handholding at even short focal lengths, always shoot at a minimum of 1/100 of a second.

If light is fading and you cannot shoot at the above speeds, you need to get out your tripod. Then you can slow the shutter speed to almost anything and still not get a blurry image. Or, if you want to shoot slow to blur something that is moving, get the tripod and shoot slow.

ISO – Automatic is o.k. most of the time. You will be more interested in picking an ISO as things get darker. I updated this chart in 2018 based on the great ISO capabilities of newer cameras.

- Bright sunshine – ISO 100 to 200 ... best quality (I use 200 as a minimum since I handhold a lot, want more shutter speed and have never noticed any shortcomings with an ISO 200 image)
- Overcast days – ISO 200 to 400 ... essentially the same quality
- Dusk – ISO 800 -1200 ... slightly more noise, but not much
- Darker - ISO 1600 and up ... will want to reduce noise in post processing
- A moose running through the woods at midnight – ISO 100,000